


Like Footprints on the Seashore

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Like Footprints on the Seashore

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Summary

It was almost funny. For someone who was already dead, he didn't much understand death.

Wilbur died when he was 8. So, obviously he doesn't really have much of an affect on the story. Yet.

This is a collection of one-shots that give a little bit of backstory for Wilbur in my story One More Step Out of the Pit. It is the sister book to One Step Forward which is about Technoblade and Phil's backstory. I'd suggest you read what's up of those stories first because this kind of ruins some of the mystery in both.

Notes

I was going to give you a ridiculously fluffy chapter in One More Step Out of the Pit today, but then... for reasons... decided to work on this chapter. If you watched Tommy's stream today (4/29/21) you might have an idea why...

So, have some Ghostbur angst! That's what we all need today, huh?!

This chapter overlaps the first chapter of One Step Forward.

Chapter 1

It was almost funny. For someone who was already dead, he didn't much understand death.

Maybe that made sense. He'd died when he was only 8 and, while most 8-year-olds could comprehend death more than younger children, their understanding of it was still developing. At least, that's what that one child psychiatrist had said to the dad of a girl whose mom had just died after a supervillain burned her face off.

Her face had been all sorts of bubbly and looked incredibly painful. It was probably good that she'd died. Her family didn't seem to agree with Ghostbur considering how much they'd cried. Then again, alive people were always silly like that.

He'd taken to drifting around hospitals in the past few years. He liked to see all of the things that happened there. He watched as people died and he watched as people didn't. Nowadays, he probably knew more about how and why people lived or died than most of the doctors. There wasn't much for him to do besides sit and stare at the dying. Meanwhile, doctors had to worry about whatever alive adult people worried about: taxes, cars, kissing people, and other silly things.

Death was something Ghostbur was very used to, and already being dead, he was rather numb to it even when he watched people try to save one another and cry when they couldn't. So, when people started getting all in a tizzy in the hospital rooms and at the park with the ducks and on the streets near the apartment his dad had moved to after Wilbur died, Ghostbur really did not care. Sometimes more people died than other times, and that was something that just happened. It was boring, to be honest. Someone was going around stabbing people to make them dead; it wasn't exactly an unfamiliar concept to him. His own fatal stab wound still morbidly oozed blue through the shirt he'd died in. Not that anyone could see it or him.

He almost hoped sometimes when he watched someone slip away into death that they'd end up doing whatever Wilbur must have done to make himself die wrong. It'd be nice to have someone else who stuck around. It got pretty lonely when no one knew you were there.

Yet, most souls only lingered for a moment or two after someone died before they fizzled out: disappearing forever or going off somewhere that Ghostbur could not reach; he wasn't sure which.

Was it mean to want someone to die? Was it mean to want to damn someone to something that was functionally hell? The living probably thought so, but, of course, the living were silly.

Case and point: everyone freaking out because of the one unstoppable person who'd been slicing his way through the city with nothing but a sword made of iron. *Silly*.

Or... at least, it did seem silly for a while. Ghostbur didn't care about a lot of things, but despite being dead, he did still care about one thing.

He spent a lot of time around his dad. Not all the time, of course. He liked spending time at different places, especially when Dad was doing boring living people things, or worse, boring adult living people things. At the beginning, he'd hang out around the school he'd once attended, though he'd eventually grown bored of the classes taught there, and the faces of the people he'd once known changed and their bodies grew until most were unrecognizable. He'd discovered hospitals about 3 years in with their intriguing amount of death and life and suffering and healing. He spent most of his time away from Dad there, but he'd also drift around other places. There was something still nostalgic

about the old park he used to play in and sometimes he'd wander through local colleges to pick up scraps of information from different lectures and open textbooks. When good ones came around, he'd watch music concerts, drifting around behind the musicians on the stage as they played and sang.

Yet, he always ended up coming back to Dad.

Dad had never been the same after Wilbur died. He'd been heartbroken in ways Ghostbur struggled to understand and the grief had changed him suddenly and then slowly.

It had made him sadder. He would cry sometimes out of nowhere even 8 years later. There were nights where he'd be cooking dinner and then suddenly collapse on the little apartment's kitchen floor. There were days he'd walk through life in a daze. They were a little less frequent now, but nowhere near gone.

It had made him meeker. He used to be so strong with a personality to match his superstrength and a pride to match his impressive wings. Though, upon reflection, maybe Wilbur had just had stars in his eyes when he looked at his father. Now there were days where his breath came too quick and shallow. Knives made him flinch sometimes even in his own hands. He'd once had a full breakdown in a back alley because he'd had to help some lady who'd gotten stabbed by a mugger.

It had made him softer. His dad had always been a kind man, but now he went through life with a gentleness that wasn't there before, especially when it came to younger people, especially when it came to children. He was more careful when he spoke to those who were afraid or weak. He'd talked too young to understand children patiently out of closets when their houses were on fire. He'd taken an interest in training new superheroes and was more often doing that than fighting villains in the streets. He wanted to show them how to be safe, Ghostbur had overheard him tell a coworker. He could see Wilbur's face every time he looked at a child, he'd told another.

Wilbur's death had ruined him in a lot of ways, but somehow, he still got up in the mornings. He still helped people. He lived.

Ghostbur didn't care about many things, but he did care about that.

Which explained why when, after the person that had been rampaging through the city had killed over twenty people in one day including police officers and superheroes, and his dad had stepped up to try to stop the carnage, Ghostbur suddenly felt himself feeling a lot of things he hadn't quite realized he could.

Ghostbur was numb to death, but... he did not want his dad to die.

He wished he could speak to him. He wished he could beg him not to put his life on the line. He wished he could remind him that he hadn't fought supervillains like this in years. He wished for a lot of things, but his dad had never been able to see or hear him. Today was no different. All Ghostbur could do was what he always did: follow and watch.

They ended up in an alleyway, a long way away from anyone else who could help. The police sirens were far in the distance. It was just his dad and the murderer.

Well, and Ghostbur.

Yet, as afraid as Ghostbur felt, he did notice that something was odd. Ghostbur had a vantage point that no one else did and he found himself noticing things about the murderer that he doubted anyone else could. He did not look like Ghostbur had expected considering all of the stories he'd heard.

He'd expected someone a lot scarier. Sure, he was covered in drying blood, but so were doctors sometimes, and that wasn't scary. Ghostbur had anticipated someone taller than dad with maybe something like giant sharp horns and fangs to emphasize that he was the evil everyone had said he was, but his face was normal, and he was short. He was maybe about a foot taller than Ghostbur was if he put his feet on the ground instead of hovering and he had a really bad haircut.

He also didn't seem to want to fight Dad. He was backing away, his grip was shaking a bit on the sword he held, and he was breathing heavily. He seemed... scared which was strange for someone who'd expertly sliced through a bunch of people including a speedster like they were nothing. Dad was strong and maybe a bit intimidating when he wanted to be, but this person had killed dozens of superheroes in the past few weeks. Why would he be scared?

Dad cornered him in the back of the alley. When the murderer brought the sword up, Ghostbur held his imaginary breath, really hoping his dad didn't flinch like he sometimes did when cutting up vegetables. Yet, Dad was focused and determined. His hands did not shake when he brought up his own sword. Strangely, the murderer's did.

The two swords clashed with a sharp sound and the murderer stumbled back. Ghostbur, unworried about stepping through the swords as they couldn't hurt him anymore, had a good view of the murderer's face. Something horrible, scared, and seemingly resigned entered his eyes the moment he felt Dad's superstrength in the hit.

Ghostbur watched as the fight ended swiftly, over in just one more swing. Dad managed to snag his wrist and force the weapon out of it. He made a pained sound as he fell to his knees at Dad's feet, a sword touching his neck.

It was... confusing. He was supposed to be incomprehensibly good at fighting, but he was down in two hits. It didn't make any sense.

Dad looked down at the boy on his knees for a long few moments. Something shifted just slightly in his expression and Ghostbur wondered how much of what Ghostbur had noticed about the boy his dad had too. There was silence.

The instructions Wilbur had overheard them give out at the Superhero Guild Headquarters had been simple: bring him in dead or alive, but it had been clear that everyone very much expected dead. Ghostbur was pretty sure Dad had expected dead. How was he or anyone supposed to have anticipated the resigned fear and pain on the face of the person who'd rampaged across the city? They'd expected him to go down fighting, not to cower on his knees on the pavement after barely any fight.

Ghostbur waited. He did not know the decision he would have made, but that didn't matter. What mattered was Dad's decision.

After almost a full minute, he slowly reached forward to handcuff the boy and received no resistance in return, just confusion. The boy just seemed so lost. Dad picked him up in his arms and he simply laid there cradled in them, eyes open, but still and quiet as though he were as dead as Wilbur.

Ghostbur followed them as Dad flew to the closest containment facility for people with superpowers. Nothing happened the whole way. He walked past shocked guards and other superheroes to put the boy in one of the cells without any issue. He set him on the little bed they had for prisoners and the boy did not react.

Dad left then, probably to go talk to people and decide what to do from here. So, no one saw the surprise on the boy's face when he was left alive in the cell. No one saw when he decided it was safe to move and he curled up into a protective ball on the bed. No one heard him breathing harshly as he tucked his face into knees.

Well, no one except Ghostbur.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Okay, so, note that I added the "Graphic Depictions of Violence" tag. I don't think I'm quite at the point where I need to bump the rating to M, especially since I'm pretty sure this will be the worst of it, but feel free to mention it if you think I do.

There will be a summary at the end in case you don't want to read this. It's the same topic as in Chapter 3 of One Step Forward, but not filtered through Technoblade's more distant narration.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ghostbur found himself once again in the cell with the boy his dad had defeated. He'd become in the last few months the boy's most frequent visitor. Not that the boy knew that of course.

One might think Ghostbur would grow bored of watching him after a while. He didn't do much; mostly he just stared at a wall with distant eyes. Yet something kept pulling Ghostbur back to him again and again. There was something about those brief moments no one except for Ghostbur saw where his eyes weren't blank, where it looked like the boy was drowning in air. There was something in the way he looked at Dad when Dad came to visit him every few days. There was something about his face when he finally passed out from exhaustion and slept curled up in a little ball.

Ghostbur couldn't leave him even though he often wished he could, because there were things he didn't particularly want to see. People were... very mean to him. The shouting and being rough when taking him places were bad enough. Ghostbur was sure he would have been very scared by it all if he'd been in the boy's place and alive, but definitely the worst part is when someone decided to get physical.

Wilbur had never gotten hit. Maybe he'd been shoved a bit hard on the playground a couple of times, but he'd never been one to get into fights. He certainly had never gotten hit by an adult. It... didn't... look... pleasant. Watching it made him feel things he didn't know he was even capable of as a ghost. It made him feel things he didn't even know Wilbur would have been capable of. Infuriated was a good word, but it didn't quite encapsulate the full scope of the bubbling feelings that he could do nothing about.

Clearly, the people who came to beat him weren't actually supposed to be doing it, though Ghostbur was pretty sure some people were turning a blind eye to the behavior. They were careful to bruise him only under his clothing and not bad enough to need medical care. It was almost worse how careful they were. If they'd gotten angry and lashed out mindlessly, it'd be bad, but this was all calculated and planned. They did it to hurt him as much as possible without facing the consequences for their cruelty. Ghostbur knew the boy had done bad things, but that was still... needlessly mean.

Ghostbur wished so hard that he could speak to the boy. The boy had not said a word even to people who were nicer. He hadn't even to Dad, but Ghostbur thought maybe he could get the boy to talk. He imagined the boy was kind of afraid of adults at this point, but Ghostbur wasn't an adult! Yet, being able to talk to him was not actually something that could happen no matter how much Ghostbur wished for it. At least, being able to talk to him and be heard was not something that could happen.

“Sometimes I like to play the song lyric game in my head,” Ghostbur said to him as he sat on his bed staring at the cell wall. “Dad and I used to play it when we had to drive places. It’s not quite as fun to play by yourself, but it’s still something to do when you’re lonely.” He paused, floating a bit closer. “I know it’s not the same because I can go around and see whatever I want and you’re... stuck here, but I think it’d still maybe help. The normal way to play is one person sings a line of a song, and then the next person has to sing a line of a different song that starts with the last word of the first line. You go back and forth like that, uh, except when you’re alone you just do all the steps yourself.” Ghostbur was hovering only a couple of inches from his face, but he looked right through the ghost. Ghostbur sighed. “I wonder if you know many songs.”

The boy moved as Ghostbur asked that, but it wasn’t in reaction to Ghostbur’s pondering. No, there was someone at the door. The boy didn’t hesitate to walk to the door and stick his arms through the slot to be handcuffed; he never did even when it was one of the people who came back time and time again to hurt him. This wasn’t one of the normal ones that came to hit him, but Ghostbur didn’t like the look on his face when he stepped into the cell and closed the door behind him.

The man barely wasted any time backing the handcuffed boy into the corner and hitting him across the face. Ghostbur was immediately worried, because this man wasn’t trying to hide the marks which meant his plans were very different than the ones that came before him. The second brutal hit sent the boy crashing to the ground, his blood splattering against the cement floor. Ghostbur flinched with every hit as he watched, curled up into himself floating in midair, helpless to do anything to stop it. Ghostbur gasped, realizing why the man hadn’t bothered hitting him in places that could be hidden when a knife was pulled out. He was going to kill the boy.

And he did.

The man pushed the boy’s head down with one hand and slashed the knife across his throat with the other. The boy’s mouth moved, but no sound came out as blood spurted and pooled around his dying form, and Ghostbur had seen a lot of people die, but this was probably one of the worst. It was just so bad. He was just so helpless tied up and cornered like that, and now he was dying. It was just so horribly sad, and it didn’t help that Ghostbur had somehow managed to form some sort of one-sided kinship with him. Ghostbur felt like he was going to cry which was again a feeling he hadn’t know he could have now that he was dead.

He floated closer to the boy, watching as his body gave out. Ghostbur knew it was over when as always when people died, there were a couple of moments where the boy’s soul, an image that looked kind of like what Ghostbur’s always did, pulled away slightly from his body. It hurt to know from past experience that it would flicker out in a moment leaving Ghostbur alone and the boy’s body cooling on the floor. Needing to do something to comfort him even if it ended up ultimately meaningless, he reached out a hand to touch the soul before it fizzled out of existence.

Yet, the fizzling and disappearing never happened. Instead, the visage seemed to bright momentarily and Ghostbur felt an odd sensation like he was being tugged a step to the side...

The boy was on the floor again, eyes open and terrified and alive as a fist smashed against his face the same way it had before, and then the knife came out again and slit his throat.

Ghostbur didn’t touch the soul again, but he could still feel himself get tugged once more.

The boy was on the floor again, eyes open and terrified and alive as a fist smashed against his face the same way it had before, but this time Ghostbur noticed the boy moved in a different direction before the knife came out again and slit his throat.

Another tug.

The boy was on the floor again, eyes open and terrified and alive and though the man beating him, the man killing him acted the same, the boy did not. Ghostbur was not the only one who remembered the last times this had happened. The knife came out again and slit his throat.

Ghostbur may have been 8, but he was also not 8 at all, and he wasn't stupid. Plus... he had a lot of time to think in those couple of seconds that happened more times than he could stand to count. By the time the boy finally managed to do something to avoid the knife's first strike (though not the second), Ghostbur had already put all of the pieces together.

Oh, he thought.

Oh no.

No wonder he seemed so confused and scared. No wonder he'd seemed so different on the TV than when Dad had fought him. When Dad had taken him down *without* killing him.

What a horrifying, horrifying superpower.

The fight continued on and on, over and over, and Ghostbur watched as the boy tried and died and tried again. There was nothing Ghostbur could do.

But then, there was Dad. The boy managed to stall the man with the knife just long enough, and Dad must have been on his way for one of his visits, because the cell door opened suddenly. The man killing the boy paused, and Dad acted seemingly without even fully registering what was going on. He grabbed the man away and the knife went clink against the ground bloodied, but this time not with life blood.

There was a paused and then the scene must have registered. "What is going on here?" Dad asked, eyes blazing, wings flared, and voice dangerous.

"I wasn't going to kill him," the man spat. Liar! Liar! Liar!! "I was just gonna scare the bastard a bit."

"He's bleeding!" Dad said, not falling for the lies at all.

"Yeah?" the man spat back, "and what does it fucking matter? He's a murder!"

"Maybe," Dad yelled back, "but you're not a bloody executioner!" There were more people at the open cell door now, summoned by the raised voices. Dad shoved the man towards one of them. "Get him out of here and put him in a cell."

"Fuck you, man. Don't fucking protect him! He killed my *sister*."

"And we're putting him on trial not knifing him handcuffed in a cell! Get him out." The steel in Dad's tone had a couple of them grabbing the man to pull him away as instructed even as he cursed up a storm.

"What the hell happened?" asked one of the other people.

Dad began to explain what he'd walked in on, and Ghostbur turned away to hover over the boy still on the ground. His eyes were open, but he wasn't moving, and he reminded Ghostbur of rabbits when they'd get so startled, they'd freeze in place.

“I’m sorry,” Ghostbur whispered, even though he couldn’t be heard. He settled down so it looked like he was sitting with his knees to his chest near the boy’s head and tried to pet his hair even though his hand went right through it and a bit into his head. Ghostbur hadn’t ever tried to cry as a ghost, but he found himself making the attempt now. His tears flowed blue like the stuff that oozed from his chest.

Dad demanded a first aid kit after his brief explanation and made everyone else leave before turning his attention fully to the bleeding boy. Dad looked heartbroken by the sight, and he didn’t even know.

Dad reached out for him and he flinched, but Dad just hushed him gently, lifting him into his arms like a baby and settling him on the bed.

“It’s okay,” Dad said. “I’m going to help you, alright?” The boy’s eyes focused for the first time in what felt like days to watch as Dad inspected the wounds on his face and shoulder. “Okay, now, that arm of yours is going to need stitches,” Dad said in a warm calming voice that soothed Ghostbur a bit even though it was not meant for him. “I’m going to put some numbing jell on it first, so it doesn’t hurt. It’ll feel a little weird for a bit, but it’s not bad.”

Dad slowly started to patch him up, and the boy began to calm down. Ghostbur felt himself calming with him. He settled next to him, hovering over the bed so they were shoulder to shoulder. The boy tilted his head to look at Dad and Ghostbur’s eyes caught on a flash of color in his otherwise white hair. Ghostbur blinked at the little splatter and then at his own hand covered in his tears: blue.

Chapter End Notes

Summary: The events of Chapter 3 of One Step Forward happen, but from Ghostbur's perspective. After the first time Technoblade is killed, Ghostbur reaches out and touches his soul before time resets and ends up getting pulled along. He continues to get pulled along through all of the resets watching Techno die repeatedly until Phil steps in. Ghostbur ended up crying and managed to get a bit of blue in Technoblade's hair, unnoticed by the two living occupants of the room.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

This takes place during and after chapters 5 and 6 of One Step Forward.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ghostbur had known going in what an execution was. Sure, he was 8, but he was also not 8, and he'd been around long enough to know what was going on in the courtroom. It was pretty clear that the boy, however, did not know what was going on. He didn't even seem to understand what court was, let alone that he was being put on trial for multiple counts of murder and was at risk of the death penalty.

Ghostbur didn't know a whole lot about how court was supposed to work. He'd never really hung out around them before, much preferring hospitals, parks, and schools, but even he knew just from watching tv shows that deciding to kill the boy without him understanding why or even that he was going to die at the end was pretty rude.

Of course, he wasn't actually going to die at the end, Ghostbur knew, but they didn't know, and it was mean besides because, as both he and the boy knew, dying hurt. Execution by electric chair seemed to hurt quite a lot too. Ghostbur could do nothing but float around and watch as the boy figured out what execution meant in the worst way possible. Then, they were all back in the hallway outside.

The boy was quick, running away from the guards taking him off to death, but Ghostbur worried it wouldn't be enough the first time. There were a lot of people around, and yes, they were all confused at the moment, but they'd quickly figure out what was going on and join the efforts to capture him again. To Ghostbur's relief, he somehow managed to run straight into Dad on his first try. Ghostbur just knew his dad wouldn't let this sort of thing happen, and he was proven right pretty quickly and dramatically.

He loved his dad. He was really, really cool. He told his mean boss that he quit and then smacked around a bunch of super powerful heroes before flying away with the boy in his arms. Ghostbur had, of course, followed right behind them all the way to an abandoned train yard.

Ghostbur had always liked trains. Wilbur had read the Boxcar Children when he was little and had always wanted to live in a train car. Dad had once taken him to see this trainyard. Not many people went there anymore because train travel wasn't used much anymore where they lived, but Dad had remembered it was there from when he'd been a child. Wilbur had tried to convince his dad to take one of the train cars home with them to play with. Dad could have done it too! But, Dad said it would be a little 'conspicuous' if he stole a train car and carried it home on his shoulder. He wondered if Dad was thinking of him when he flew here.

Yet, the realization that they'd be living in a cool train car (even if Ghostbur wouldn't actually get to live there exactly) was not the most exciting thing that happened. No, that was the fact that the boy actually spoke for the first time. Dad got him to talk, and Ghostbur got to learn that his name was Technoblade that first day. It was... an odd name. Dad seemed to think so too, but he didn't suggest

changing it. Ghostbur would have suggested changing it to something more sensible if he could. Like Chad or Jeremy. Alas, Ghostbur's opinion could not be heard.

The two of them talked a little more about different things, but there wasn't any more to learn about the strange boy named Technoblade that day. Ghostbur had already been well aware he did not know what a lot of things were.

Technoblade, it would turn out, did not like to talk much. In fact, he didn't unless Dad directly asked him a question or made him talk in some other way. He did what Dad asked of him quietly as they set up the train car into a more comfortable place to live. Dad always seemed cautious to leave him alone, and Ghostbur would frown when he'd lock him in the train car when he left to get supplies, but Technoblade didn't seem to even notice. He'd just sit there like he had in the cell, which was worrying. At least it was a bit nicer than the cell, and he could go outside when Dad was there. Both he and Dad got their own mattresses and blankets, and Dad liked to bring back little knickknacks every time he left to show to Technoblade. Ghostbur was not sure if Technoblade liked or understood these offerings, but Dad still brought them back every time.

Dad settled down a bit once they had a livable place and didn't go out for supplies as much. He took to talking to Technoblade more. Technoblade would get uncomfortable with complicated questions or when there were too many being thrown at him, so he took to only asking 5 questions a day. One of which was always if Technoblade had any questions. So far, the answer to that had always been no even though that was probably a lie.

Dad talked a lot though, about all sorts of things, telling stories that Ghostbur found himself enjoying greatly. Dad used to always tell great stories, but he hadn't really had many people to tell them to since Wilbur died. He thought Technoblade enjoyed them too even though he didn't show it much. Or maybe he just enjoyed not being in prison.

Yet, even though Dad did most of the talking, Ghostbur got to learn a lot about Technoblade over the next few weeks. He didn't have parents looking for him which they'd learned through him shaking his head when Phil asked if he did; he really liked his eggs over easy judging by the way he ate them when Dad made them for him; he favored pastel colors judging by his choice of blankets; and he was somewhere around 14-year-old.

Huh, Ghostbur realized, counting the years. If he was alive, Wilbur would have been 16 by now.

...

Oh, Technoblade was just a baby. Oh.

Oh! That was really sad! So many things had happened to him, but he was still just a baby. He was younger than Ghostbur was! Wilbur would have still been a child himself if he'd never died. Technoblade was barely a teenager.

He found himself wondering after this revelation about what type of dad Dad would have been to a teenage Wilbur. He'd just be starting to drive on his own. Would Wilbur have gotten to take the car and go out to scary movies with his friends on the weekends? Would Wilbur have started helping out with things like laundry and grocery shopping? Would he have been doing a lot of extra things after school to get ready to apply to university?

The local university had always seemed fun when he'd lingered around in the classrooms, the library, and the big cafeteria with all kinds of foods. He would have still been a few years away from attending unless he was really, really smart.

He'd have been in high school instead. He would have done things like eat sorta gross looking food in the cramped cafeteria and make friends in different clubs. Ghostbur wondered if Wilbur would have chosen to take band or choir or art. There would have been things like school dances to attend and Prom. He'd seen a few of those on TV before and had once gone to watch one at the high school he would have attended just to see what they were like in real life. The TV ones looked a lot more fun. The real-life ones were full of a lot more crying people and gross kissing. Would Wilbur have liked dances? Would he have seen something in them that Ghostbur simply could not because he'd been too young when he'd died? He would have definitely liked the fancy clothes at least. They were fun looking even to Ghostbur.

Ghostbur had never been able to change his clothes since he'd died. He was still in the sweater he'd died in with the orange lion on it. It had been slightly too small for him and itchy when he'd been alive not that it mattered now since he couldn't feel it. He looked down at the sweater. It had a rip in the middle from where he'd been stabbed to death, and blue stained the rip and oozed out of the ever open wound he could not feel.

Ghostbur wished he could change his clothes.

If Ghostbur was alive, he'd change his clothes into a big sweater that was warm and slightly too big. He'd hug his dad, and he'd hug Technoblade. Then, he'd make sure no one ever hurt Technoblade again, because he'd be the bigger one and could protect him. Like a big brother.

Ghostbur had never really wished to be alive again before. He was dead, and that's how it was, but now he often found himself hovering by Technoblade's head as he slept at night very much wishing he was flesh and bone, so he could sooth his brow or kiss his forehead.

Every so often, if he wished hard enough, Technoblade woke with just the barest trace of blue on his skin.

Chapter End Notes

Wilbur, when he finally meets Technoblade in the flesh: I am your big brother.

Technoblade: No.

Wilbur: It is years too late for that my *baby brother*.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Just a quick warning: there is some self-harming behavior in this but it's not really wanting to be in pain hurting himself type behavior, but more... for science! hurting himself behavior.

This takes place after Chapter 8 of One Step Forward, though mentions events that happened between Chapter 7 and 8.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Dad, I love you,” Ghostbur lamented, “and you’re a really good dad, but please, *please*, he doesn’t know what Stinging Nettles *are*.”

Dad, of course, could not hear him, and continued to obliviously read a newspaper while he let Technoblade explore around, but not too far into the woods near the trainyard. He was keeping an eye on Technoblade insomuch as he was making sure he did not wander too far away or start climbing tall trees, but he was not paying attention enough to make sure he was not touching things he should not.

Mistake.

Technoblade, to Ghostbur’s distress, loved touching things he should not, mostly because he did not know better and was curious. The boy was currently sitting on the ground, staring at his own hand as a rash slowly began to creep across it. Surely that hurt or itched or *something*, but his eyes were only curious. To be fair, he was probably pretty numb to a lot of small pains after all of the times he’d died, but *still*.

He’d jerked his hand away when he’d first touched the plant on accident, something Ghostbur had noticed, but his dad had not. Yet, instead of doing the rational thing which was whining to Dad to make it stop feeling icky, he’d just sat next to the Stinging Nettle plant, puzzling over it and how his skin was reacting to touching it.

“No, don’t touch it again!” Ghostbur yelled when Techno reached out to brush his fingers over the leaves once more. “It hurts! Surely you at least know it hurts by now!” He did not hear Ghostbur’s plea. “*Dad!*”

Ghostbur really, really wished he was alive right about now. Honestly, Dad was doing his best, he really was, but he just didn’t *understand* Technoblade sometimes. He often forgot that Techno did not know things he took for granted especially the ‘common sense’ things.

It didn’t help that Techno didn’t tell him everything. In fact, Ghostbur was pretty sure he had never once volunteered the information that he was hurt to Dad even when the hurt was obviously more painful than just a jerk of a plant.

Technoblade had started asking questions finally, which was great, but asking questions came with curiosity. Which, don’t get Ghostbur wrong, curiosity was good, but curiosity combined with the life experience of a 5-month-old baby and the body of a 14-year-old who could just *do things* could result in some bad things. And the worst part is, he did not go to Dad when these bad things happened. No,

if something went wrong, he just shrugged, hid the damage, and went about his life not telling Dad unless he was caught (sometimes literally) red-handed. To Ghostbur's frustration, Dad did not often catch him.

Just last week, he'd made the discovery that metal could get very hot in the sun. He'd experimented with this discovery by finding some stray pieces of scrap metal about the same size, putting one in the shade and one on top of the roof of the washroom train car, and then coming back to touch them later. He'd burned his forearm horribly, proceeded to cover it up with a sweater, and just went about his day. Dad still did not know about the slowly healing burn. If Ghostbur was alive, he'd ground Technoblade. He was older, so he could!

And there were other littler things that Dad did not catch. At first, if he was going to be gone for a bit, he'd set out food for Techno and tell him to eat it during the day, which he'd always done. Now, he trusted Techno to feed himself in his absence without instructing him to do so. After all, he knew how to prepare a lot of the food now considering he'd been helping Dad with dinner. He should *not* trust him with that. Techno assumed if he was not told to eat, he wasn't supposed to. Dad did not realize this, and Ghostbur just had to hope Dad never had to leave him for an extended period of time. So far, he'd just go without lunch for a day every so often, but it was terrifying to think about. He was sure starving to death wasn't a fun way to go.

He also would not tell Dad when things made him uncomfortable. At least there were obvious, universal cues for things like when he was too cold and needed another blanket for his bed, but some things didn't come with obvious tells. He never said when the clothes Dad gave him itched or when he got rocks in his shoes when they were walking. He'd tell him if something was wrong with his food only when Dad asked and there was no way that the portions Dad slapped on his plate were always exactly right, but he always ate all of them and never asked for more. He just seemed to take these sorts of things as facts of life and not things that Dad could and would happily fix if he just indicated they were problems in some way. Considering that Wilbur used to complain about every little thing that went slightly wrong when he was alive, watching this happen was unbearable.

At least things were slowly starting to get better the more comfortable Technoblade got with questions. He was slowly starting to question why things happened around and to him and rejecting things he did not like, though he was doing this slowly. He was careful with what he asked Dad even as he started to ask more things and even more careful with what he said no to.

He'd even started to slowly test the waters with Dad, while still keeping the serious things like injuries and discomforts close to his chest, guarding them like they'd be used against him. He'd say no when Dad was making foods he didn't like to see if Dad would make him eat them anyway. He'd skip a chore Dad asked of him 'on accident' and then not 'on accident,' watching with calculating eyes when Dad noticed the empty water bucket or uncleaned plates to see if he'd react in anger. Yet, the most serious things, he just let happen to him without complaint.

The only sign this might at some point change was the haircut incident. It was a hot button issue Dad had simply stumbled upon and still did not know that he had. Dad had wanted to cut his hair, because it was getting unmanageable, but it had immediately been clear that Techno was more than uncomfortable with the idea. To Ghostbur, Dad hadn't noticed the different type of tension in his frame or the way his eyes flashed with unease at the topic being brought up. Ghostbur did not know what about getting his hair cut was a big deal, but it was clearly something, and considering people had obviously not treated him well before Dad, it was probably something traumatic.

Luckily, despite Techno never quite being able to articulate why he did not want his hair cut (Honestly, Ghostbur wasn't sure if he even fully got what was wrong himself.) and Dad never quite

realizing something was really, really wrong, they managed to stumble their way to a compromise. Ghostbur had been relieved when Dad had ended up giving up on the haircut and went through the long process of detangling his hair instead.

Funnily enough, this led to something else that Dad did not notice about Technoblade which was a whole lot less tragic and a whole lot more adorable. That being, Technoblade had clearly realized that he liked Dad messing around with his hair that day. Dad remained oblivious to this even though Techno was *so obvious* about it. Did Dad really think that Techno couldn't figure out how to braid his own hair after a couple of weeks? Wilbur had literally seen him braid it when Dad wasn't watching because a bit had come loose and gotten into his face. Yet, he still handed Dad a brush and a hair tie every morning, and Dad still continued to braid his hair while uselessly explaining how it was done. Meanwhile, Techno would just sort of melt in the chair, completely tuning out the already absorbed instructions. It was adorable, a little sad because Dad hadn't noticed, but adorable still.

"This is less adorable," Ghostbur hissed as Techno studied the raised white dots peppering his own hand. "You should be in trouble, Mister."

"Phil?" Techno called over Ghostbur's last words.

"Yes?"

"What is this plant?" he asked, pointing to it.

Dad set his newspaper aside and got to his feet. He studied the plant Techno was looking at for a moment. "Techno, did you touch that?" he asked.

"Yes, he did," answered Ghostbur. "Twice!"

"It bit me," Techno replied, showing his hand with the rash on it to Dad. "I didn't know plants could get angry."

"Here, let me see," Dad said with a frown, kneeling to get a better look at the rash. "It's a Stinging Nettle," he explained while looking at it. "It's not angry. It just has a natural defense to keep things from eating it."

"Why would I want to eat a leaf?" Techno frowned down at the plant as though insulted by its assumption that he'd want to eat it. Dad really should feed him more fresh vegetables like lettuce... "It's stupid."

"I..." Dad said, trying not to laugh. "Some animals would want to eat leaves and it can't tell if you're one of those animals or not, so it just attacks anyway."

Techno nodded. He seemed to understand this concept.

"Anyway, let's get your hand washed and then get you some cream to stop that rash from itching."

Ghostbur gave a sigh of relief even as Technoblade frowned in confusion while being led off to the washroom.

"You should have grounded him," Ghostbur grumbled to Dad, but he could forgive the lapse in parenting abilities. At least Dad was doing his best, and that seemed to be enough for now.

Chapter End Notes

Can you give a ghost white hair? Ghostbur may just find out! This era of watching Techno is the cause of the Revivebur white hair streak in this universe. Everyone wonders why this 8-year-old has white hairs.

Can you imagine how annoying Wilbur is the second his backseat parenting can be heard? He's going to be so annoying. XD XD

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

This takes place 2 days before and a bit during Chapter 9 of One Step Forward. I would highly suggest reading Chapter 9 of One Step Forward FIRST.

Dad had been acting weird all morning. Technoblade obviously did not realize that anything was odd about Dad's behavior, but Ghostbur sure did. He told Techno that he needed to go to town to pick up supplies, which was odd because he usually only went for supplies at night unless it was something very planned, and he hadn't been planning for a day trip.

So, while he usually stayed with Techno when Dad went out on supply runs, Ghostbur chose to follow Dad into the city that day. Dad had, for some reason, chosen to go out and buy things for real from the shops during the day instead of stealing things at night and leaving cash to reimburse the place like normal. He'd put on a large coat to hide his wings and a tight hat that hid most of his hair. Plus, he'd put on glasses. It did not completely hide him since everyone knew his face, but considering it had been a few months since his face had been plastered on the news as someone on the run, it was probably enough to keep the casual observer from recognizing him immediately.

Ghostbur followed him around the supermart, curious to see what he'd buy. He instantly figured out what was happening when Dad grabbed streamers, balloons, scissors, tape, and wrapping paper and put them in a cart. Birthday! Stuff to decorate for a birthday! Stuff to wrap presents for a birthday! Birthday presents for Technoblade! Oh yay!

Wilbur had *loved* birthdays. Dad always made his birthdays really great. Sometimes, he'd have parties with all of his friend, or they'd go on trips to cool places and spend the day together. Dad always gave him awesome presents and got him cake and let him sleep in as long as he wanted! Even Dad's birthdays were fun. Wilbur had tried to do similar things for him for his birthday, though it was sort of hard as a literal child, but Dad had always appreciated it and they'd always had cake still! Now Technoblade got a birthday! It was great!

Ghostbur also figured out quickly why this had to be a day trip when, smiling awkwardly, Dad approached the counter in the video games section of the store.

"Hello," he said to the store employee, "Do you have any of those gaming systems that kids carry around sometimes?"

Said employee blinked at him from behind a display of Nintendo 3DSs and PlayStation Vitas. "Yeah," she said as Ghostbur giggled. "We do."

"Those do not have to hook into a television or computer, correct? They are fully portable now?"

"Yes."

"Okay good," Dad said. "Things were different the last time I messed around with this sort of thing. There are better games on those than on phones nowadays even though they are still small, yes?"

She looked at him for a second. It was long enough that Ghostbur became worried she'd figure out who he was. "How old's the kid?" she finally asked.

"He's, uh, turning 15."

"Alright then..." she said.

Under the advisory of the woman helping him and by pointing to games he at least sort of recognized the names of, he ended up getting one of the Nintendo 3DSs and three different games: a Super Mario game, a Donkey Kong game, and Spider-Man: Edge of Time.

He thanked the woman cheerfully with those things in hand and then turned to a nearby section in the store that hosted DVDs. He seemingly grabbed every set of DVDs he thought might interest Techno and dumped them into the cart. Ghostbur wondered how much money he had. He knew that the Guild paid him a lot before he quit, since he'd been a level 10 hero at that point, and without Wilbur to spend it on, he'd probably accumulated a lot over the years. Then he'd drained his main bank account before the Heroes Guild could think to freeze it, so he had a lot of cash, but still, that's a lot of expensive things. Not that Technoblade didn't deserve it!

Once he'd bought all of that with a large wad of cash, he packed everything except the wrapping paper (which wouldn't fit) into his bag and walked down the street to an ice-cream shop Ghostbur vaguely recognized from going there a couple of times as Wilbur. He asked to order a birthday cake and was given a catalogue of cake designs to flip through.

"You should get the one with the fish!" Ghostbur exclaimed pointing at it excitedly. "Look! There's a little whale tale sticking out of it and sea-shells!"

Dad flipped past that cake with barely a glance and Ghostbur pouted at him.

"Fish are cool," he grumbled.

Dad ended up picking out a pretty plane cake that just had balloons on it like an old person might want even though there were a lot of perfectly cool cake designs. He ordered it to pick it up a couple of days later and instructed the person to write 'Happy Birthday Techno' on it.

He then found an alleyway where it'd be safe to take off his coat and took off flying, but to Ghostbur's surprise, he didn't head back towards the trainyard. No, he headed to another place Ghostbur recognized.

Ghostbur winced. It was a place with a bunch of storage units, out of town, but much closer to the highway than the train yard was. Dad hadn't wanted to get rid of a lot of things from their home when he'd moved out of their old house, especially Wilbur's things, but he also hadn't had enough space for things in his apartment. So, he'd rented a storage unit. He didn't come here much.

"Why are we here?" Ghostbur asked, feeling... not too good about the location. He'd never really liked it here. There was, of course, no answer. Dad opened the storage unit and flicked on the one light bulb it had.

He closed the door behind him and sat down on the cement floor in the middle of the storage unit, Ghostbur hovering over him unbeknownst to him.

"How do I do this?" he said aloud after a couple of seconds. He settled his forehead on his knees.

“It... it’s just a birthday party Dad,” Ghostbur said, but well, now that he thought about it, Dad hadn’t really celebrated his own birthday since Wilbur died, let alone someone else’s.

“I can’t do this,” he breathed. He sat there for a long time, head on his knees and breathing slowly. Then, he picked his head up and grabbed the bag and wrapping paper. He pulled out the Nintendo and the games, considered them for a moment, and then grabbed an empty larger box from one of the piles in the storage unit to wrap them together. Then he wrapped each of the DVD sets individually and stacked all of the presents together. He stared at the presents, sighed, and put his forehead back on his knees.

Then, he stood up. He paced around the small space. His hand came out to brush against the side of a box that held one of Wilbur’s favorite things from when he was really little: a set of huge pop-up tubes and blocks that could attach to each other with Velcro. He’d loved to make Dad push around the furniture in the living room so he’d have enough room to set them up and crawl around in them.

There was a small white bookcase filled with books, some of which Wilbur had never been quite old enough to read on his own. Ghostbur could probably read them now, if someone were to open them for him, but they remained closed on the bookshelf.

Even Wilbur’s old bed was here, transported from their house and covered in plastic, but pretty much the same. Dad had even remade it with the bedsheets Wilbur had used before he died, like he expected one day for Wilbur to just come back and need a place to sleep.

This was Wilbur’s tomb, his resting place, as far as Dad knew, far more than a little grave on a hill outside the city where his bones were currently rotting away.

Dad’s hand touched the top of a chest and he seemed to think for a long moment, frozen in place. He popped open the lid and looked inside. It was filled to the brim with stuffed animals. Wilbur had always been a fan of those, begging for them in toyshops and forcing Dad to play the crane games to get them. Some were his absolute favorites he played with all of the time, and some had just sat in a pile in the corner of the room where he’d occasionally dive into them dramatically for fun.

Dad stared at them for a long moment. “Would you mind?” he asked the room.

“No,” Ghostbur said, choked despite needing no air. “I wouldn’t.”

He hesitantly reached a hand into the chest and dug through it until he pulled out a stuffed polar bear, its white fur yellowed just a bit from being in storage all of these years. Ghostbur thought he vaguely recognized it, but it was not one of Wilbur’s favored ones. Dad studied it carefully. “You probably would,” he mused. “You never were good at sharing.”

“I wouldn’t,” Ghostbur said, hand hovering over the stuffed animal, desperate longing in his chest as his dad hesitated, debating rather to put it back and bury it with the rest of Wilbur once more. “Dad, please. Please.”

He did not hear him, Ghostbur knew, but it was almost as though he did because he straightened and shut the chest securely before standing and walking away. He put the presents and supplies back in his bag and then carefully put the stuffed polar bear on top of the pile before closing it up tight.

Technoblade’s birthday was a couple of days later. Dad decorated their train car and put a party hat on his head. He got him pizza and picked up the ice cream cake. He showed him how to play the Nintendo and let him unwrap all of the DVDs. Then, when all was said and done, when most of the

balloons were already falling off of the walls and they'd finished off their slices of cake together, he took the stuffed bear that had once belonged to Wilbur and placed it in Technoblade's hands.

Technoblade hadn't seemed to know what to make of it at first, but he'd accepted the gift that was from Dad, but also had just a little bit of Ghostbur in it too. He fell asleep with it in his lap that evening and it stayed even when Dad took the Nintendo out of his grip and set it aside for the next day.

It would stay in his bed even when they moved out of the trainyard years later, always within reach when he slept.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

This was supposed to be out before chapter 12 of One Step Forward, but it just wouldn't come. Had to scrap it a couple of times. Anyway, this takes place between chapter 11 and 12 of One Step Forward.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The farm was a good and a bad thing in Ghostbur's opinion. In many ways it was great! Technoblade loved the farm and was really good with the animals. It was so cute watching him interact with all of the adorable farm animals. He loved every single one of them and they all loved him in return.

This fact had surprised Dad at first, but it had never surprised Ghostbur. Living people were silly, but animals were much better at knowing when someone was good. Techno was good. He was soft and gentle with the animals. He cared about their needs and always tried to learn more about how to help them. It was clear they understood how he cared for them and appreciated it.

Ghostbur did feel just a smidgen of jealousy that *he* couldn't pet all of the animals too. His hands would just go straight through them, not leaving so much as a mark no matter how hard he tried. He did try a lot. It was more than just wanting to touch the animals; it was practice. He'd been able to leave a bit of blue on Techno a few times and on Dad once, but he couldn't figure out how or why it only worked sometimes. It was very frustrating, even more frustrating than not being able to pet the soft fur of all of the goats, horses, and cats.

At least his jealousy about that stuff was usually short lived. No matter how much he missed being able to interact with people and animals, he knew Techno probably had never gotten to pet any animal in his life before Dad had brought him here. Ghostbur's jealousy would fade away when he remembered Wilbur had gotten to go to petting zoos and pet dogs at the park his entire life. Techno deserved the chance to pet things even when Wilbur couldn't anymore.

It was a little harder to shake off the jealousy that was aimed towards the other living things on the farm. It was one thing with Dad because it was Ghostbur's Dad, and Dad had proven himself worthy of Technoblade's attention from the beginning. The people running the farm had not in Ghostbur's eyes and he felt a flash of burning envy every time one of them or one of the people who attended horse-riding classes interacted with Techno.

It wasn't fair! Technoblade was Ghostbur's little brother. He should get to talk to him and smile at him, not these random people! Yet, Technoblade didn't even know he'd ever existed, let alone that he was still around. It made him sad. It made him angry. It *was not fair*.

When he thought about it rationally, the people on the farm were nice, he guessed. Kurtis was fine. He sort of reminded Ghostbur of Techno in a way if Techno was older and a bit more world wise. He seemed to like animals much better than people. In fact, the only people Ghostbur really saw him talk to outside of business talk were his own daughter and Techno. Rarely, he'd have a short, awkward conversation with Dad, but those were usually about Techno anyway. Kurtis obviously appreciated how much Techno liked the animals and how careful he was when taking care of them.

Deedee was okayish. She was a little less on the same wavelength with the animals than her father, but she seemed to love them all the same. She was nice to Techno in a way that made Ghostbur's nonexistent blood boil sometimes even though he knew he wasn't really mad at her. She was a good teacher, doing better at showing Techno things about the world than Dad had so far. It sometimes made Ghostbur pout, because he knew all of those things too and would have told Techno if he could. She did have an adorable puppy though who loved her a lot, so she couldn't be all bad. Even if she cruelly locked said adorable puppy outside sometimes.

"I know Bea," Wilbur said as the dog stood at the backdoor to the house, barking up a storm. "It's not fair that we don't get to help." He patted her head, but his hand went right through her. "You don't have opposable thumbs and my thumbs can't touch anything. What a pair we are."

Technoblade and Deedee were currently inside canning peaches that they had picked from the farm's small orchard earlier that morning. Bea had been exiled after she'd almost knocked over an entire cart full of glass jars.

Eventually, the dog settled down, laying down to set her head on her paws and whining pitifully at the door.

"Poor puppy," Wilbur cooed. He floated down to hover near her head.

She made another sharp whining bark.

"I know, I know," Ghostbur said, pressing his cheek to his knees. "Tell me about it."

And she did, or at least, she continued to make more begging sounds hoping to be let in. Ghostbur knew her exile would only be temporary, but he still felt sympathy for the poor thing.

He was not the only one. Kurtis eventually appeared, having walked over from the barn. He wore an empathetic expression while looking down at the puppy. Bea noticed him when he stepped onto the porch and quieted down. "Oh Bea," he said, stripping off his work gloves and crouching to scratch her ears. "Did they lock you out?"

She woofed.

"Well, it's just temporary, I'm sure," Kurtis said. "You'll be let back inside soon." He pet her a few more times before straightening up. "Why don't you hang out with me until then." He moved to go sit on one of the porch chairs and Bea trailed after him. She laid at his feet, still sad, but not alone.

Ghostbur frowned at them as they left him on the ground near the door. He stayed there in his little ball on the ground until he heard his dad's voice a little while later.

"Hi, Kurtis," Dad said. Dad was always nearby when Techno was at the farm. At first he'd lingered pretty closely, but as the summer progressed, he'd started to give him a little more space. He never left him alone on the farm though. "Do you know how long they'll be? I was thinking of taking Techno out to dinner in town before it gets too late."

"Don't know," Kurtis said. "Haven't been inside. Knowing Deedee, she probably got distracted by now. You can steal him from her whenever you need."

Dad glanced at his watch. "I'll give them a little bit longer," he said. "Sun's still out late enough that we should be fine."

Kurtis nodded and they lapsed into silence for a while. Kurtis remained in his chair and Dad stood near the porch railing. It was a bit awkward, and Ghostbur didn't think it was on Dad's part. Dad was usually good at talking to people.

"You've got a good kid there," Kurtis noted after a bit.

Dad glanced up at him, a curious tilt to his head. "Yeah?" he asked.

"Mmm," was the reply. "He's seen some shit though. You can see it in his eyes."

"Yeah," Dad agreed.

"Foster care, you said?"

"I did," Dad replied.

Kurtis tilted his head back, so he wasn't looking at Dad anymore, but at the hanging plants on his porch. "I don't know his story, but you seem to be doing well with him."

"I'm doing my best," Dad said, "but if I'm honest, I don't know his entire story either."

Kurtis hummed. Silence came again. "He coming back in the spring?" Kurtis asked after almost a full minute.

"If he wants to," Dad said. "It seems to be good for him." Dad paused. "I imagine he'll want to."

"And you'll be coming back with him?"

Dad looked slightly amused at the question, probably because he'd already broken Techno out of prison and was on the run from the law with him. "I assure you," he said. "I'm certainly in it for the long haul with that kid."

"Good," Kurtis said. "Good." He stood up abruptly, turning towards the door. "I'll go check on their progress for you. Gets dark later than you'd expect these days." He opened the door and Bea dove for the opening before he could stop her, racing into the house.

"Thanks," Dad called, but the man had already disappeared into the house.

Chapter End Notes

Bea:



[from Imgflip Meme Generator](#)

Ghostbur:



[from Imgflip Meme Generator](#)

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dad and Techno ate the entire cake before the end of Techno's birthday. If Techno had been left to his own devices with a cake in his vicinity, Ghostbur would not have been surprised by this result. Techno seemed to run under the philosophy of 'it tastes good, so it goes in mouth.' As long as he knew he was allowed to have it and it hadn't already killed him once, he would eat it. The concepts of 'nutrition' and 'a balanced diet' were all but a myth to Techno that Dad on occasion used to justify why he was not allowed to eat his weight in chocolate daily.

What was a surprise was Dad didn't only allow but encouraged this behavior today. Dad usually did his best to eat a reasonable number of sweets. Well... around Technoblade he did his best to eat a reasonable number of sweets. Ghostbur had seen him when he thought he was alone down an entire package of Double Stuffed Oreos and two cartons of ice cream in one sitting while crying on the floor of his old apartment's living room.

Hmm...

Was Ghostbur's dad a stress eater?

Today had certainly been a stressful day for him. He'd been stressed enough about Techno's birthday from the beginning. It wasn't the first birthday he'd thrown for Techno, but it was the first one where they went out and did things, and it was the first time taking Techno to the city. He'd been filled with anxious energy for most of the day which, ironically, made him prone to distraction meaning he ended up losing Techno multiple times during the day. This only heightened his anxieties. And *that* was all before Techno had found the exhibit dedicated to himself.

It had been less than 10 minutes between Techno wandering into the exhibit and Dad finding him. It had taken him a while to figure out what the exhibit was about even with the tapes feeding him information. He'd eventually come to the videos. Ghostbur hadn't actually been paying attention to Techno's massacre at the time. He hadn't really cared until Dad got involved.

Ghostbur couldn't see in the tapes what had actually happened to Techno. He just had to guess what had gone on before the last iteration where Techno managed to kill the person on screen. Ghostbur watched him replay each video once or twice, a confused expression on his face. Techno, Ghostbur realized also couldn't see in the tapes what had actually happened to him. He saw the realization of what other people had seen happen slowly dawn on him.

Dad had come in during the second playthrough of the last video. Ghostbur didn't really want to think about what had happened leading up to him managing to slice apart a *speedster*.

Dad had been even more stressed out then. He'd gotten Techno out of there and had taken him home. With his newfound understanding of how the world had seen his actions, Techno finally managed to explain everything to Dad.

It clearly only stressed Dad out more, but it was a relief to Ghostbur and maybe to Techno too. He at least had to be relieved that he could finally make some sense of the events leading up to now.

They continued to talk for a long time after the revelation. Dad obviously had questions and things he wanted clarified, and Techno was willing to talk things through since he himself was still trying to piece some of it together and saying it out loud seemed to help. Even Ghostbur got to learn things about Techno he didn't already know.

They started with talking about where exactly Techno had come from. Dad was very interested in the fighting ring he'd been forced into as a child. It made Ghostbur sad and angry that his baby brother had been put through those things when he was even more of a baby. Dad seemed just as if not more disturbed than Ghostbur.

"Where is this fighting ring?" Dad asked. Even if Ghostbur didn't know his dad and didn't know how protective he'd grown of children since Wilbur's death, he would have been able to tell just by his eyes how much he wanted to destroy the place that did that to Techno and other children.

"Uh, somewhere in the Middle Ring," Techno said with a shrug. "I'm not sure where exactly. I didn't get to go outside and wasn't paying attention when escaping."

"The middle fighting ring?" Dad asked, confused.

"No, the whole fighting ring was in the Middle Ring of the Pit."

"What's the Pit?" Dad asked, confused. Ghostbur wasn't sure what that was as well. Techno seemed confused by Dad's confusion.

"The Pit," Techno repeated. When repeating the name just made Dad shake his head, he tried to elaborate. "Uh, it's a place. It's underground. There're three levels: lower, middle, and upper. There's a barrier around the upper part that keeps everyone inside."

Ghostbur managed to figure out what he was talking about before Dad. Wilbur had never heard about the place during his life. It wasn't talked about often though everyone seemed to somehow know about it. In fact, the only time Ghostbur had ever picked up real information about it had been in one college class that he'd decided to linger in.

"You're talking about the Netherrealm Prison," Dad finally concluded after a bit of thought. Techno did not seem to recognize the name himself and just shrugged. "I guess I never realized..." Dad trailed off with a frown. "So, you were from a fighting ring in the Nether. How did you get out then?"

"When I escaped the fighting ring, they chased me down," Techno explained. "They had a tracker on me, so they kept finding me easily." He shrugged off his jacket to show what looked like a red tattoo in the crook of his elbow, "even when I made it to the Upper Pit Ring, they still found me. I couldn't hide and there was nowhere to go, so the only option ended up being running at the barrier until I found a weak spot." Ghostbur winced wondering how long it took him to figure out that was his only option and how long it took for it to work. "Then I was up here, and up here was better."

"You..." Dad said. "You were almost immediately chased down and killed by everyone from civilians to high profile superheroes. Then you were imprisoned and almost executed without a fair trial."

"I used to die in the Pit every night I fought," Techno pointed out. It was a fair point. "I haven't died up here since you took me away. It's better."

Dad was quiet at that. He seemed to be gathering his thoughts, but Techno continued before he could do so.

“Plus, there are stars here,” he said. “Those are good. And horses are good. And you are good. There were none of those things in the Pit. Not even for the people in the Upper Ring.”

Dad looked stricken at that explanation. That was when he got up to get his first piece of cake.

There was more discussion then about the Nether and what exactly went on down there. Dad seemed particularly disturbed by hearing about this. That was fair, because the class Ghostbur had sat through pretty much glossed over the nastier implications of what probably happened after a bunch of powerless villains were put in an underground prison, and no one was ever let out. Ghostbur didn't think Dad had thought about those things ever before in his life.

Eventually, they did stop talking about the Nether and went back to talking about Techno's life in particular. Dad must have realized that power suppressants didn't work on Techno's powers if his powers had worked in the Nether, because he cautiously brought up the topic of Techno's execution. Techno confirmed that he was successfully executed once before he'd been able to figure out what was happening and run away.

“I'm sorry,” Dad said when he said this.

“Why are you sorry?” Techno asked. He casually ate another bite of cake. They were more than halfway through the cake.

“I should have been paying more attention. I should have prevented it from happening in the first place.”

“You stopped it,” Techno replied. “That's more than anyone else has ever done, and you did it three times.”

“Three times?” Dad asked. Obviously, he knew the first which was not killing him when capturing him and now he knew the third which was stopping Techno's execution. Techno then had to explain that Dad hadn't actually stopped that man from slitting his throat while in custody the first time around. Techno did not, Ghostbur noticed, explain just how many tries it took until Dad got there. It would just be his and Ghostbur's little secret then.

It was nightfall by the time Dad ran out of questions. He had already run out of cake. The last thing he asked was, “Do you want to take the cuff off, then?”

“What?” Techno asked.

“The power suppressant cuff,” Dad said, “since it doesn't seem to work on you anyway.”

“It's supposed to do something?” Techno asked.

Dad just laughed a bit shakily. “Yeah,” he said. “I can take it off if you'd like.”

“Sure,” Techno said. He offered the arm with the cuff on it.

Dad was able to remove it fairly easily. It'd been one of his suppressant cuffs after all and he knew how to take it off as well as he knew how to put it on. “There,” he said, rubbing Techno's wrist even though the cuff hadn't left a mark even after years of wearing it. His eyes glanced at the clock set up in the kitchen area. “You should probably be going to bed,” he said. “You've had a long day.”

Techno nodded. He did honestly look tired, though he didn't look nearly as tired as Dad. A few minutes later, he was climbing into bed while Dad cleaned up the cake remnants. “I'm taking this to

the outside trashcan,” he told Techno in a whisper. “I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

Techno gave an acknowledging hum and Dad turned to leave the train car. Ghostbur followed him out.

He crumpled almost immediately, sitting on the ground a few meters from the train car, but out of view of the entrance. “Fuck,” he said.

“It’s okay, Dad,” Ghostbur said. He put one of his hands over the hand Dad was still using to grip the plastic container the cake had come in. “You did good even when you didn’t know it.”

Dad remained silent. Ghostbur remained next to him.

Eventually, Dad sat back and glanced up at the stars. His hand slipped out of Ghostbur’s grip as he settled it on the ground beside himself. The blue left near his wrist could have been from the frosting on the cake container. All of a sudden, he let out a big sigh. “And I forgot to give him his fucking presents.”

Chapter End Notes

And here we see the precursor of Stress Baking Phil: Stress Eating Phil! Both Phil's are covered by the following meme:



The Return of Wilbur

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Ghostbur hadn't expected Dad to go to his gravesite. Maybe he'd have been able to guess if he'd realized it would have been Wilbur's 18th birthday, but things like dates slipped Ghostbur's mind easily. He'd gotten slightly better since Techno had come around at noticing time moving and seasons changing, but he did not count the days. There wasn't really a reason for him to keep track of the date.

So, he'd been completely blindsided when they'd landed on *that* hill.

Wilbur used to love this hill. He'd only been able to come up here a few times in his short life. It was quite the trip. Just getting to the lake at the base of the hill was quite the trip and hiking all the way up to the top was even more taxing. If his father hadn't had superstrength and wasn't able to handle carrying a child for long distances, Wilbur probably would have never actually made it to the top in his lifetime. He was glad he had gotten to come here. It was a pretty place and quiet. Some of Ghostbur's best memories of being alive were on this hill. It was why Dad had buried Wilbur's body here.

Ghostbur... wasn't sure how he felt about the hill now when his body was buried on it.

The peaks of hills eroded over time. He wondered if he'd linger long enough for this hill to wear away.

He wondered if there'd be anything left of him at that point.

For now though, his body was a few feet underfoot and his soul was lingering with the person who'd known and loved him most in life.

Dad was grieving. He always had been, but this was a different type of grief. This was acceptance, that stage of grief that had eluded Dad for almost a decade now. He'd grieved so very hard for so long, and he'd shied away from acceptance at every turn. Ghostbur didn't think he'd even wanted to consider ever accepting Wilbur's death. For a lot of years, he seemed prepared to slowly wither away under his sadness. He was prepared to mourn until death took him too.

Yet now here he was. He was making himself stare grief in the face for the first time since Wilbur's death because he knew he couldn't stay drowning in it as he had for years. He had Technoblade now. Technoblade needed the real him. The shell of a man emptied out by the death of his child would not be enough and Dad knew it. It would have perhaps been enough for a compassionate prison guard to a killer, but it was not enough for this.

So, Dad came here and finally said goodbye.

Ghostbur thought he should probably be sad about that, and he was a bit, but...

But.

Wilbur's name was in his father's mouth for the first time in years.

Ghostbur had not always been Ghostbur. Wilbur had died. He hadn't left. He'd become a ghost, but that ghost had been *Wilbur*. Dying hadn't made him Ghostbur. He'd stayed Wilbur for a while.

And then people had started to forget about him.

His teachers at his old school had been horrified when they'd learned about his death. His name had been whispered in the teachers' lounge for months. His teacher had cried. His past teachers had cried. Yet, as was the way of the living, things moved on. Eventually, his teacher got a whole new class. Eventually, Wilbur became just another student who had moved on even if, upon thinking about it, she'd remember it was a very different way of moving on than just moving to the next grade. All of the teachers had eventually stopped talking about him entirely.

His classmates and friends had mostly not even been told about what had happened to him. They'd all been too young to really understand death, and so their parents didn't tell him. They'd wondered where he was at first, but eventually, they'd forgotten about him. He was just another face in a yearbook they vaguely could recall years later. As far as they'd been concerned, he was just some kid whose family moved away mid-term.

Dad had never forgotten about him. That much had always been clear. He'd cried tears for Wilbur. He'd held onto Wilbur's things. He'd wandered through life like a ghost himself most of the time. He'd looked at children and anyone who knew could tell that Wilbur was in his mind's eye.

And the last time he'd ever said Wilbur's name was at the funeral.

There was something uncanny about not hearing your name for such a long time. Eventually, the name stops feeling like your own. It slips from your grasp like sand in an hourglass.

There'd been days where he'd sat alone in his old bedroom past when all of his things had been removed and Dad had moved out. Past when a new family had moved in and a little girl had taken over his room. He'd spend hours in the dark, sitting against his closet door and whispering the name to himself over and over again. But like any word you say again and again, it eventually stopped feeling real. It's meaning and his connection to it slowly wore away, disappearing like footprints on the seashore. When the little girl had convinced her parents to paint her bedroom, he'd finally given up trying to make the name feel like his anymore.

He thinks that's when Wilbur actually died.

And now here Ghostbur was. He circled the gravestone as Dad spoke, eventually settling in front of it. Opposite him, Dad knelt in the snow, apologizing for finally deciding to move on. When he reached out and laid his hand on the gravestone, Ghostbur leaned forward to pass his own incorporeal hand through the stone to touch their palms together.

"It's okay," Ghostbur said. "It's okay."

When Dad drew away, it was with a palm colored completely in blue. For the first time, it was enough for Dad and Techno to notice the blue, and the color was there for days. Dad and Techno spoke about it, confused by what had caused it, but eventually they stopped mentioning it.

However, to Ghostbur's surprise, they did not stop mentioning *him*.

It became clearer by the day that accepting Wilbur's death was not his Dad forgetting about him. On the contrary, Dad seemed to be remembering him for real for the first time in ages. He would speak

about him almost daily, usually little things. Some of the things Ghostbur didn't even remember himself.

Dad would say his name almost every day. He'd say his name to Techno almost every day. Ghostbur's little brother knew his name; he knew him just a little bit.

It was the best 18th birthday present Wilbur could have.

Chapter End Notes

Memes will return next chapter, but I literally don't know what to meme on here...

Stable Fable

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone, this is a new chapter of this fic that I wrote today.

My short answer regarding the question of if I will continue this and my other stories is yes. If you would like a longer answer, you can look at this tumblr post [here](#).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“What have you been feeding that boy this past year?” Kurtis asked. Ghostbur glanced over at him and Dad from where he was trying very hard to pet Bea who was laying collapsed on the floor of the barn after having been running all over the farm this morning. He hadn’t left any blue on the dog yet, but he was sure he could eventually.

Dad currently had the barest tinge of blue in his hair. The boy they were talking about had a smudge of blue on his neck.

Ghostbur watched with Kurtis and Phil as Technoblade went about storing away the last crop of dried hay for the season. It was hard to tell if Techno was showing off the agility he’d been steadily growing over the past almost year or if he was just seeing the shortest way from point A to B he was physically capable of taking and taking it. As they watched, he decided to forgo the ladder leading to the hayloft and simply used an overturned crate to vault up and grab the edge of the loft with one hand. He pulled himself up over the side. This was after an entire morning of moving hay with Kurtis, Deedee, and Dad.

Deedee was currently driving to get the last load to store. Kurtis and Dad were currently taking a break. Technoblade was sweaty and had taken a required break for water when Dad insisted but had quickly gone back to work.

“Would you believe me if I said everything in my home?” Dad asked with a laugh.

“I would,” Kurtis said, smiling. “Deedee and I should make sure you get some more canned food for the winter. Good homegrown stuff’s good for a growing young man.”

“I like the jams,” Technoblade contributed, pausing in his rearranging of the hay to glance over and down at them.

Dad rolled his eyes. “We all know you like the jams, Tech.”

“Good.”

Dad just shook his head and turned back to Kurtis. “You’ve already sent us back a lot this year. Make sure to keep some to sell.” It was true, Ghostbur knew. Kurtis and Deedee had given them far more than they had last year. Dad had had to clean out an entire new train car to hold it all.

Kurtis seemed to stall for a moment, going quiet as he watched Techno toss another haybale into its rightful place. “It’s been harder to sell this year,” he admitted.

“What?” Dad asked, confused. “What do you mean?”

“I’m not able to sell in the city this year,” Kurtis said.

“Why not?” Dad asked.

“New food regulations,” Kurtis said. “I don’t meet them.”

“What regulations?” Dad asked, glancing around the barn as though expecting to see health code violations in plain sight. “I’m not an expert on farming, but your operation seems perfectly fine.”

Kurtis smiled, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “It’s not about quality,” he said. “Not really.”

Ghostbur found himself drifting closer, interested in the darkness he could sense in Kurtis’s expression.

“Then what are they about?”

“They’ve been passing a lot of laws in that city,” Kurtis said shaking his head. Ghostbur could hear the undercurrent of anger in his tone. The mild-mannered man was never usually angry, but he was about this even if he barely was showing it. “Not just about food, but those are the ones I know the most about since people’ve been snooping around trying to sell me on shit or trying to get me to sell them shit that ain’t for sale. City’s new laws are strict. They won’t let food from seeds they don’t approve of be sold, but it has nothin’ to do with how good those seeds are. It’s the opposite really. Most of them are the types of seeds that don’t make more seeds. The ones that do make more seeds? Well, to get ahold of ‘em, you’re contractually obliged to return the seeds at the end of the season, and you have to buy the seeds you made again in the spring. ‘Cause the seeds and the plants never belonged to you even after paying to grow ‘em and raising them up yourself.

“That’s weird,” Dad said with a frown.

“Not as weird as I’d hope,” Kurtis said softly. The anger seemed to drain from him leaving a certain type of sadness, of disappointment. “I’m not doing it,” he stated. “I know better even if it’s cutting into profits. I’m lucky enough to not need the money. I own this land and I own my seeds. I’m not giving those things up. Unfortunately, I’m pretty sure some people are naïve enough or poor enough to have to.”

“I mean,” Dad said. “It’s not the best, but I’m sure it’s not the end of the world.

Kurtis raised an eyebrow, leaning back against the wall he’d been standing next to. “You sure about that?” he asked. Dad looked at him. Ghostbur could see Techno paying attention from up in the loft even though he didn’t stop working. “I’m old, Phil. I’ve seen a lot of things in my life. I don’t forget, and I know the signs.”

“Signs of what?” Dad asked.

Kurtis looked up into the loft where Techno was, but he didn’t seem to be looking at Techno. “You know,” he said slowly. “They say there was once a dark king that ruled over these lands.”

“There was?” Phil asked. “I haven’t heard of that.”

“It was only a small little area he ruled,” Kurtis said with a shrug. “People don’t much like to talk about it; it scares them. History books very much like to sweep it under the rug and not mention it; it

doesn't fit with their narrative. But, yes, there was someone who called himself a king around these parts a long time ago now, but not long enough."

Kurtis's eyes trailed to one of the horses who noticed the attention and snorted at him. The horses liked Kurtis just like they liked Technoblade. That's one of the reasons Ghostbur was listening to him intently now, maybe even harder than Dad was.

"They say he wasn't a very good king. He was cruel and ruled with an iron fist. He took what he wanted from his people and killed anyone who stood up to him. He ruled over his small kingdom for many years unchallenged. Nothing could remove him from his throne. Well," he paused, "nothing but the one thing that eventually comes for all of us no matter our strength or power."

"What's that?" Dad asked.

"Death," Kurtis said. "Now, no one killed him, of course. No one ever could, but time always eventually wins." He glanced at Dad. "He died of old age."

"Oh."

"The worst of people are always the ones to die of old age," Kurtis continued, bitterness in his tone. "He didn't even lose his power on his deathbed, not completely. He still had servants waiting on him hand and foot. He even had a servant boy whose life was dedicated to mopping his brow and filling his water glass for those last days."

Techno had finished up moving around the hay and had sat down on the edge of the hayloft to look down at them, a complicated look on his face. Ghostbur imagined he had the same complicated view about death that Ghostbur did.

"The servant boy," Kurtis continued, "grew bored watching an evil tyrant slowly die. Eventually, his boredom overcame the fear he'd once had of the man, and he decided to pass the time by talking to the king. The king was surprisingly receptive, willing to talk to the boy. Maybe even dark kings get lonely when they realize they're dying." Kurtis shook his head. "I don't know, but eventually, the boy felt comfortable doing something very few people had ever dared to do. He asked the king a question."

"What question?" Ghostbur asked. No one heard him, but Kurtis continued anyway.

"'How did you do it?' the servant boy asked. 'How did you rule for so long?' And, fairly sure the king was too far gone at this point to smite him, he continued. 'Everyone knows you are an unjust leader, but you've still never been toppled. Even now, the others fear you enough to take care of you to your death.'"

"The king," Kurtis said, "did not seem angered by these questions. Instead, he just looked contemplative. He probably looked more human than he had in years as he answered. 'When I was your age,' he said. 'I lost my wife to the river, and it destroyed me from the inside out. For months I pleaded with God to bring her back; God didn't listen. But eventually, someone else did. I sold my soul to the devil that day. He not only put breath back in my wife's lungs but gave me even more than I could have imagined. The only cost was the wedding bands I'd handcrafted straight from my own and my dead wife's fingers.'"

"Now," Kurtis looked up at Dad and then back toward the hayloft. "The boy knew, of course, about the king's mysterious wife. Everyone did. She was barely seen. She lived up in the highest tower of the castle. Everyone knew there was something wrong with her. She never went out during the day,

and she never spoke. A couple of days later, right after the king died, her body would be found at the base of the tower, dead. The person who found her there would say water dripped steadily from her dead mouth until the sun rose in the morning. Then, the corpse would burn away into ash. The boy did not know that last part at the time though.”

“The king continued in his speech. ‘I was given riches, prestige, and most importantly,’ he said, ‘the knowledge of how to keep all of that power. The devil whispered it into my ear that day, and it’s what kept the throne in my possession even now when I don’t even have the strength to sit on it. He said there were three different things one needed to control a person.’

“He smiled at the servant boy, golden tipped teeth shining in the sunlight from the window. ‘Would you like to hear them?’”

“Morbidly curious, the servant boy agreed.”

“‘The first thing you need in order to control someone is power over their body,’ the king divulged. ‘That’s simple really. You control what and when they eat, how much sunlight they see, how fast they can run, and when they bleed. You make them depend on you to live, to breathe. Most people buckle under things like that. You manipulate them into being a parasite on you. Then, if they kill you, they kill themselves too.’”

“The king’s eyes seemed to shine in his withering face,” Kurtis described. “He appeared excited, which made the servant boy squirm in discomfort. ‘That doesn’t work on everyone though,’ he said. ‘Some people are stubborn, so you have to control them in different ways. Which brings me to the second thing.’”

“‘What?’ the boy asked hesitantly when he didn’t continue instantly. The king seemed thrilled at his engagement.”

“‘The second way to control someone is to have control over their minds,’ the king said. ‘That is much harder, and it takes much longer. People’s minds do not bend as fast as their bodies, but they are fickle. They forget things eventually. They can be swayed. Burning books is a start but buying the printing press is better. You can try to control what people say, but people will always try to get around it behind closed doors. Spies or secret police help. Make people never know when the person they’re talking to is yours, so they don’t speak to anyone and don’t spread ideas amongst the rabble. All of that takes time, but it’s doable. I did it.’”

“The king smiled, and the servant boy wiped the sweat off his brow. It was why he was there, after all. The king’s excitement seemed to have raised his temperature. It would surely push him faster towards death.”

“‘That’s how I did all of this,’ the king said, laying back and looking tired, but proud. ‘That is how I built my empire and got everything I could have ever wanted.’”

“The servant boy paused and waited for a good long while before finally asking, ‘And the third thing?’”

“The king looked up at him and frowned. ‘The third thing?’ he asked.”

“‘That’s what you said,’ the servant boy reminded. ‘The devil told you there were three things you needed for control. What was the last?’”

“The king hesitated, his eyebrows drawing together as he thought. ‘I’m not sure he ever told me,’ he said. ‘You’d have to ask the devil.’”

That seemed to be the end of the story from Kurtis. There were a few seconds of silence.

“That’s a pretty extreme case,” Dad said hesitantly. I’m sure whatever is happening now isn’t that bad.”

Oh, Dad, Ghostbur thought. Always the optimist even after everything.

Kurtis smiled darkly. “It never is,” he said, “until it is. I’m not fool enough to give anyone control over my land or the food I grow on it, and I’m not fool enough to forget. I’m certainly not fool enough to sell anyone my soul.”

Ghostbur heard Deedee pull up in the truck with the last bale of hay.

Kurtis glanced up at Techno who was peering down at him intently. Then, Kurtis smiled for real. “You boys take as much jam as you want,” he said, “especially with all the work you’ve been doing when us old folk need a break.” He turned to door of the barn. “Feeding people is the least I can do.”

Chapter End Notes

I wish I had more to offer people who are comforted by this universe today. I wish I had a meme or a chapter that felt more meaningful than this one. However, I have made the decision to continue this story and this was the next part of this story. Maybe that is meaningful enough.

If you missed it and want to know my plans going forward, I made a statement [here](#).

In the Beginning

Chapter Notes

Hey!

I play with formatting in this chapter a lot. I would suggest reading it on a computer or at least in landscape on your phone.

If you are using a screen reader, I have an accessibility chapter here. [here](#)

Thank you to CocoBeans, Valcove, and Crow of Shadows for betaing this chapter to see if it made any sense at all.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ghostbur didn't like the rain.

Lots of people seemed not to like the rain, at least sometimes. They'd shout angrily when cars sped past them on the street and splashed them with the gathered rainwater. They'd curse the weather when they had something they'd wanted to do outside that day and couldn't because of it. They'd run to the nearest cover quickly when there was a sudden downpour while they were outside.

But they did not dislike the rain like Ghostbur did.

Wilbur had liked the rain, Ghostbur remembered. He'd like to splash in puddles, and he'd liked to watch it fall from the window with a warm cup of hot chocolate, courtesy of Dad.

Ghostbur was not Wilbur. That was never clearer than when it was raining.

Rain was bad. Ghostbur hated getting caught in the rain on a visceral level (though he had no viscera). Nothing reminded him more of the fact that he wasn't a part of the world than water constantly falling through him and splashing against the ground through his feet. It was a revolting sight to him. It made him feel a phantom sensation of nausea like that feeling before going over the top of a hill on a rollercoaster, but without the release of adrenaline at the end to make it all worth it.

Even if he made sure to stick to places where he wouldn't get not-wet, the rain still managed to get to him, to crawl into his soul like the rain was a thousand little rats falling from the sky and Ghostbur's soul was the house they were coming to invade the walls of.

The world got fuzzier when it was raining whether he was in it or not. Rain was like static on an old TV that would ruin the picture of the living world entirely if it got bad enough. Looking outside of a window at it made him feel more and more anxious. Even just hearing it on the train car roof made it feel like the world was pressing in on him.

The rain made him feel like he was falling apart, like without a body to keep him contained, he was melting and spilling onto the ground. Different pieces of him seemed to flow in different directions faster than he could even attempt to scoop them all up again. Even as he grasped for them, all the parts of himself would flow out of his fingers like, well, like water.

Ghostbur hated that feeling. Ghostbur hated the rain.

That was how he was feeling now.

...But it wasn't raining.

Ghostbur had never really felt conflicted over if he should follow Dad or Techno around. They'd usually been together these past 4 years, and even when they weren't, there was a clear choice of who to follow.

When at the trainyard, Dad would sometimes go out for errands and Techno stayed home, nice and safe in the train car. So, Dad had been the obvious one to follow.

When they were at Kurtis and Deedee's for riding lessons, Dad would usually just wander around and maybe talk to Kurtis. Altogether he went around being boring, so Techno was the clear choice.

Now, however, there wasn't an obvious choice.

Techno and Dad had decided to try to help the civilians in the city. They'd been doing very well and had started to make a name for themselves.

Vigilantes had been cropping up in some of the neighborhoods as they always did in times of turmoil, but in the worst neighborhoods, people were too busy trying to survive for any form of heroics.

Where they did exist, vigilantes were single, ununified units that were doggedly hunted down by the heroes. They couldn't even make an effort to team up with the barriers between the different zones being so harshly guarded. They barely had enough resources to help the people close to them.

Dad and Techno immediately proved themselves different. The barriers and the heroes that guarded them were almost nothing to them. They went around (and often above) them with rarely any issues.

They brought supplies to places that hadn't seen any in weeks. They brought information across the borders. They brought combat skills that no one other than the heroes (who no help) had to the city.

The pockets of survivors had started to whisper about them; Ghostbur had heard them. It was only a matter of time before it got to the heroes, but for now they were mostly under the radar and under the cover of night.

They were a very good team, Ghostbur thought, watching them sneak down the streets of zone 13 without alerting anything that might be nearby. They'd already known each other well by this point, but in those first few weeks of rebellion, the rapport they'd slowly fostered in the trainyard between training and just living together, quickly proved itself to be something more.

They'd fallen quickly into a pattern with each other. They naturally watched each other's backs and they seemed to know what the other was thinking without words half of the time. They fought well together.

And sometimes they fought apart.

And when they were apart in situations where they could both be in danger, it felt like Ghostbur was being torn apart at the seams.

The thing with not having a physical body to keep him grounded meant, with increasing frequency, this was more literal than was comfortable.

Dad and Techno split up without a word.

Dad took to the skies, his black feathers blending into the

night. The city was almost completely dark in this zone, the power having been shut off long ago to this poor neighborhood. Considering its current state, Ghostbur doubted anyone would be putting forth the effort to fix it soon.

Dad wore a dark green costume that would be impossible to spot from the ground. Even floating right next to him, Dad was barely visible.

Ghostbur doubted Techno could see Dad, considering that even knowing exactly where Dad was in the sky, Ghostbur could just barely make out his outline. Techno wasn't looking for Dad though, he was moving towards a building and breaking into

The drug store below had clearly been overrun weeks ago. This entire part of town had been. Dad and Techno had not seen one survivor in this entire district while getting here. Even though it was doubtful there were any survivors at this point, Dad still flew slowly through the night sky, using his slightly better eyesight to try to spot any signs of life. A drawing on a roof, a shoddily made shelter in an alleyway, a light in

a window. There was an immediate reaction to the noise of glass breaking from inside the small drugstore. Techno readied his sword and hopped into the store. He

immediately stepped into

the darkness indicating someone on this city block was still
alive. Really alive. Yet, all Ghostbur could see was

a small band of zombies that had been trapped in the store
before the window was broken but were now very
interested in the potential meal delivering itself. They took
no notice of the sword in that meal's hand.

Techno was efficient when it came to killing zombies.
Ghostbur thought the zombies were probably appreciative
of this fact.

Ghostbur, from his unique position trapped between the
living and the dead, had the privilege of knowing
something probably no other soul did. Even though most
people thought there was nothing left to zombies but

lifelessness and decay. This was probably the worst of the
neighborhoods Dad and Techno had been to since
returning to the city. Even they had had trouble getting
here without getting caught or eaten.

Zone 13 was near the outer edge of the city and one of the
poorest areas. It was also near zone 12 which had been
completely wiped out by flooding.

Looking at the storefronts, Ghostbur doubted it had been much better before the zombies. The entire block had probably seemed dead before the only thing still roving through it was

a moving corpse, the people they'd once been weren't actually dead. At least not completely. Whatever virus or parasite made the zombies, it didn't kill people off as quickly as most believed. Their souls stuck around even after their bodies started moving on their own. Even after they looked like just

a blank faced zombie who, without any nearby prey to target, just looked sad. Dad pulled his bow off of his back and notched an arrow. He let it fly, and it pierced through the zombie's head. It went toppling to the ground

an empty shell, they weren't truly dead. Not yet. Not completely. It was like nothing Ghostbur had ever seen before, and Ghostbur had seen a lot of death.

When he used to wish a few souls would stick around on this plane with him, he hadn't meant this.

Techno stabbed his sword through the head of one of the zombies in the store; it fell

with a distant thump. Dad sighed and put his bow back on

his back. He'd made it to the end of the dark street and had clearly seen as little as Ghostbur had from his place next to him in the sky.

Still, he turned to sweep the neighborhood once more, hoping that maybe against all logic someone was alive here. Ghostbur doubted it. Dad, on the other hand, couldn't help but hold onto the hope that some survivor would drop

down in front of one of its fellows.

This gave Techno a chance to turn and strike at the zombie that had rounded the pharmacy counter wearing a lab coat.

Ghostbur watched as the soul that had still been attached to the zombie Techno had just killed flickered and disappeared.

The souls of the other zombies in the store appeared out of nowhere. None did. Not tonight.

Eventually, Dad remembered that checking for nearby survivors was not all he planned to do. He finished the lap and then landed on top of what looked like a moving van parked on the street.

The driver's side door was open. Who knew where the driver was or if they were alive at this point. (They probably weren't if they were in this neighborhood when disaster struck.)

Dad looked

agitated at the sight of one of their own disappearing, or perhaps excited was a more appropriate word. It was the most reactive Ghostbur had ever seen the souls chained to their old bodies. They never even seemed to notice Ghostbur or each other. Some seemed somewhat aware of the physical world, like right now, but many others just had dull, hopeless eyes.

Techno managed to slice the head off the former pharmacist and it fell

through the windshield briefly to make sure a zombified driver wasn't still hanging out inside before jumping

to the ground before rolling across the floor. Another soul disappeared. Ghostbur knew that eventually the zombies always actually died. He knew because some zombies, the older ones, didn't have souls attached to them. In fact, the one going after Techno now didn't have an attached soul.

Ghostbur assumed it was the eldest of the zombies and

had probably been the one to breach the drugstore and kill everyone else.

Techno raised his sword and chopped its head

off the van and onto the ground. He walked around the side to the back and cautiously opened the garage-like door to see what was inside.

It was mostly just furniture and some boxes. Dad jumped up into the back of the moving van once he knew it was safe. He glanced quickly through the boxes to see if there was anything useful.

However, that wasn't the main reason he'd come to the van, Ghostbur knew. Though he did end up finding some medicine

in two.

Techno turned to the last two zombies. His sword cut through them both easily. The souls detached themselves for a moment of freedom before inevitably disappearing to wherever all souls but Ghostbur did.

It was a relief to everyone in the room to see them all dead: to Ghostbur, Techno, and certainly the zombies.

Then, Techno turned to look around for anything

to take. He pocketed the bottles of pills and then started working on clearing out the back as quickly and as quietly as possible.

With his superstrength, it was easy for him to lift out the large pieces of furniture and heavy boxes. The van was empty in minutes.

Dad then studied what he'd just moved, searching for something

else that could indicate danger. When nothing else jumped out at him, he instead turned his attention towards the pharmacy shelves. He started with

useful to construct a make-shift barrier that would stop zombies from wandering into the back of the truck but would allow the living to easily get past it.

Dad ended up breaking some of the furniture with his bare hands. He set up a few hastily made spikes as deterrents reminiscent of what Kurtis had on his farm.

Then, he used an extension cord and some curtains to make a sort of stanchion across the back of the van.

If a person was inside, it wouldn't stop zombies from trying to get to them, but it'd be enough of a barrier that they wouldn't try to get in for no reason.

Then, he took the large pack off his back and pulled out some

recognizable things. He went for things like Tylenol and antibiotics. Once he'd gotten as much of that as he could, he started packing his bag with anything else that would fit.

Food was really the most pressing concern to most people in the city right now, but Techno and Dad had a source for that, even if smuggling it all into the city wasn't easy. The heroes were spending more time stopping people from bringing in any

pre-packaged supplies. Dad had carried with him 20 of these packages. Each would be able to support one adult for about a week. There was a bit of medicine (what he and Techno had been able to scavenge), water, and

food

than stopping zombies from eating citizen's faces off.

**Every delivery truck from Kurtis and
Deedee had to be parked outside city limits.
Techno and Dad had to slowly smuggle in the
supplies.**

Dad was currently setting up a stopgap supplies center. He put the prepackaged supplies in the back of the moving van where zombies (hopefully) couldn't get to them.

Drugs, however, were almost as important and getting a source for those was much harder. So, Techno took everything that looked even slightly useful before turning to

The back door of the moving van was pulled partially shut, but so people could still see into it a bit. Dad seemed satisfied with his anti-zombie mechanisms. He hopped back onto the top of the moving van to hang a green banner. Ghostbur couldn't read it in the dark, but he knew it read "Supplies".

If any survivors came by, they'd know to look in the van.

Dad looked down the street to see Techno

leave the drug store.

And then they were back together again.

And so was Ghostbur.

Chapter End Notes

Wilbur's Primary School Teacher: And what did you do over the weekend?

Gh/Wilbur: I died and spent a decade and a half starting to develop omniscience before abruptly having my consciousness shoved back into an 8-year-old's still developing brain.

Wilbur's Primary School Teacher: You know I'm not paid nearly enough to deal with that statement.

Gh/Wilbur: Yes, I'm sure that information exists somewhere in my endless pool of knowledge.

Gh/Wilbur: Anyway, my yellow crayon broke, and now I'm sad. :(

(If it didn't make any sense, be sure to read the columns individually as well.)

Hot and Cold

Chapter Notes

Alright! This should be the last chapter I really mess with the formatting. Full disclosure, you are really not meant to be read the first bit. (Between the first and last of the bolded text). All of the actual content for this is 1) the bolded text in the first part and 2) everything after the last line of bolded text.

The first part is *technically* readable. If you want to get your cork boards out you can. (It's 6 separate stories going on at once.) It won't give you any information you're not going to eventually get elsewhere in this story. It's just a bit of foreshadowing, and once I'm done with this book, I will post each of the six stories individually.

It's not like the last chapter where you can read the left and right. I just split it into left and right so you can more clearly see the line breaks.

For people using screen readers, I will have an accessibility chapter. You can access that [here](#). It does not have the 6 stories in the first part written out either.

This is so much work for something I don't even require you to read *sob*.

Also warning for cannibalism? Er... someone is a zombie and does zombie things so. Yeah...

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Staying together was getting harder for Ghostbur.

Even during times where he should be able to

It became obvious that no one alive could

stay together, he found his attention starting to drift.

The man was shaking a bit.

He didn't want it to. He wanted to stay with

Techno had immediately followed Dad, abandoning the supplies

Techno and Dad. He was even okay with splitting to

see what Ghostbur saw.

be with both of them at once no matter how disconcerting it was. However,

He was dead. He was dead. He was dead and his body still moved, but

day by day, he found his consciousness starting to unravel even during the calm moments.

Wilbur had met Bad before he'd died and remembered that
She was smoking a cigarette as she watched the two talk in the air

This was not a calm moment.

he'd always looked like a man's silhouette drawn in dark black ink, so he was sure everyone saw that,
but

He was scowling, teeth bared where he knelt in the dirt, but
Mayor Werner had

from her top floor office. After all of his time
he was no zombie.

Ghostbur doubted they saw the rest.

in the hospital, Ghostbur's first thought was that those will kill you. He remembered an old lady that
was

found out about Dad and Techno, and she was not pleased. She had instructed
in the hospital once. She'd snuck in cigarettes

Ghostbur could still see him shaking. They'd given him
which they'd brought and taking only his sword as he started running towards the city center.

There were little creatures that seemed made of the same splotchy ink that covered
Bad

Before he even made it to the end of the street, the first punch was thrown.
even though she was dying of lung cancer. Even though the doctors told her if

their master. They crawled up Bad's back and crouched menacingly on his shoulder. Dad did not
dodge

Ghostbur watched his face pinch in worry, and he somehow picked up speed. He happened to go by a
very familiar house, Ghostbur noted. Ghostbur almost wanted

To confront him and had
a blanket, but it wasn't for the cold. It was to keep him

when one of the ink creatures flew at him, claws drawn. At least, physically,
she didn't quit, she'd die within 6 months. Her 3-month pregnant daughter found her stash. She said
to stop and look, but what actually mattered had rounded the corner by now, so Ghostbur hurried after
him. The fight

There was something different about his corpse. His eyes were just as

instructed

he did not dodge. The inky creature barely managed to get an incorporeal claw into Dad's cheek before it was

lifeless, but he didn't attack everything that moved or try to bite. It was like he'd gotten a badly done lobotomy, but somehow

falling off and plummeting to the ground. Bad and Dad began to fight both in the physical realm and, it seemed, in some other realm as well. If he squinted,

right then if the old woman didn't quit, she'd never meet her granddaughter. Even if

Ghostbur could swear he could see some of the words being whispered to his dad by the ink creatures, like the words were being drawn in

from touching the freshly tilled dirt under him. His guard was a hero Ghostbur vaguely recognized.

she did manage to live, the daughter wouldn't put her child through knowing someone who would die so soon. Nor would she put her through

the air. Wilbur's name was chief among them. Ghostbur was thankful that

She had some sort of power involving electricity. Wilbur had met her once and she'd entertained him with

the danger of secondhand smoke. She

did not manage to be the thing to topple dad.

little firefly like sparks while Dad was in a meeting. She didn't look as nice today as she had been then.

It was the opposite.

Her face was rather impassive. Almost as blank as the corpse. She hadn't smoked in the hospital again. Ghostbur

watched the shaking man and

It seemed to give him more strength to beat Bad.

handed him a bottle of something anytime he asked, but otherwise ignored him. "Can I have more?" he asked. She nodded and handed him another. The liquid was purple and thick. It seemed to shimmer as he drank it, and Ghostbur

hoped she never did again.

Or at least, Dad almost beat him.

worse. Ghostbur

could make out just the slightest glow under his skin as he swallowed. They waited. They could hear Schlatt to lie in wait as back-up

He wondered why she did not quit. Maybe

the crack of Bad's body getting tossed around by Dad, far above and further into the city. The man still shook in spite, or because of, the strength potion, Ghostbur did not know. Eventually, the back and forth

continued overhead, until it came to its conclusion.

of waiting and asking for a drink was interrupted,

there was nothing to quit for.

When Bad had clearly lost, he turned his head away from Dad and spoke to one of the ink creatures hovering nearby. It darted off to an empty construction area down below.

as the ink creature landed on the shaking man's shoulder. "Do it now," was not spoken aloud, but Ghostbur could read it in the air. The shaking man seemed to know what was said too because he inhaled sharply. "One more," he said. He took the potion and pushed back the blanket. He shoved his hands into the soft dirt.

in case anything went wrong. The skeletons that had been summoned

felt more alive than him in every way. Even physically,

When the screaming started, Ghostbur could see Dad

had been dead for a very, very long time. They were stronger than zombies, made by a necromancer. Once it was done, once life had been forced into every single dead body

with more intent and power. They were faster and smarter, but with the same lust for flesh.

The skeletons began to pull themselves out at Techno's feet. There was screaming from different parts of the city, especially downtown. Techno tried to call Dad's name, but

at least Wilbur's body was free to rot and return to the dirt. Yet, despite the fact that, he was too far away to hear him.

make the decision. "You're no hero," he said, and turned his back on him, letting Bad slink away as the citizens of the city began to die.

They could even spread the more standard zombie virus to their fresher victims.

Ghostbur thought

Dad had turned away from the fight with Bad, but he clearly didn't know where Techno was. Techno continued to run in the direction where he'd last seen Dad,

in the city limits, the shaking man slumped.

for a brief moment that he saw it all.

With a dispassionate expression, she let a smoke ring dissipate as old, old skeletons began to drag themselves out of the ground. She'd be safe from them too. She watched

The hero picked him up and began to carry him.

He saw every single body that clawed its way out of the ground.

as the shaking man was carried into the building.

he was gone, despite the fact that anyone should be able to see that he was gone, there was still black ink on his face.

He saw every family huddled, shuddering in their homes.

slicing through an impressive amount of the skeletons and zombies as he did. There were so, so many skeletons though,

One of the ink creatures was on his shoulder even now holding vigil for a dead man while all of its brethren attacked the city.

He saw every victim being pulled out of hiding spots that had been safe against zombies but weren't against these new threats.

and eventually

For a brief moment, Ghostbur knew everything.

Attacked Ghostbur's Dad and Ghostbur's brother.

He even knew he couldn't handle knowing everything. But then,

he ran into a large group of them that had just managed to wiggle their way out of the ground. And they were hungry. Techno ended up surrounded by a group of 11 and...

Technoblade being bitten felt like getting dunked into ice cold water.

All of Ghostbur's split attention was suddenly pulled back to one spot, the only spot that really mattered in that moment.

And with the spite that rivaled that of a god, he sewed himself back together again.

Techno's transition into a zombie wasn't a particularly pleasant one. Ghostbur was sure he would have killed himself if he'd had the option, but unfortunately, a group of 11 skeletons was enough to completely incapacitate him, so he couldn't move. The group eventually got distracted by the sound of some other poor living thing and left him on the ground, ripped apart and dying.

It took about 20 minutes for his soul to shimmer into existence. His body stood back up shortly after. He wasn't quite dead, unfortunately, just like all of the other fresh zombies Wilbur had seen around the city. So, his powers didn't let him reset the death, not yet.

Instead, his corpse stumbled away, still bleeding, and his soul was dragged along with it.

Techno didn't notice Ghostbur even when lingering between life and death for an extended period of time, but he did seem more aware than the other souls Ghostbur saw stuck to their zombified corpses.

It was probably because he was used to death at this point even if he wasn't used to lingering in limbo as long as he did this time. (Even if it had been a while since he was forced into a reset.) Also, unlike most zombies, he likely knew he'd have to stay aware for when he finally did snap back into the land of the living.

Ghostbur trailed after Techno's corpse, side by side with his soul. He wondered if Techno's increased awareness was a blessing or a curse.

On one hand, he didn't seem as listless as the souls of other zombies. Their eyes always seemed gone, and some were seemingly completely unaware. They had no hope. They didn't even seem to be able to comprehend what was happening to them. Techno, however, was watching his surroundings closely any time his body was just wandering. Ghostbur imagined he was noting down intel for when he had the ability to use it.

On the other hand, did Techno really want to be aware of this? Ghostbur... well, Ghostbur often wished Techno wasn't. It would probably be better to just sleep through all of this. Yet, he didn't. Either he couldn't or he refused.

Ghostbur didn't usually have a visceral reaction to gross things anymore. You usually needed a stomach to feel sick to your stomach, but even he winced whenever Techno's corpse bit into human flesh. Techno seemed utterly disgusted, which made sense as he'd had a stomach much more recently. That stomach, in fact. Ghostbur just hoped he was disconnected enough from his physical form to not taste it.

If it was anyone other than Techno, Ghostbur would have turned away. He would have walked away. But it was Techno, so Ghostbur stayed by his side.

He was not the only thing that did so.

Bad's ink creatures, Ghostbur had taken to calling them devils since they liked to sit on unknowing people's shoulder and whisper things to them, had taken an interest in Techno. They seemed to have realized there was something different about Technoblade's soul and were hanging around. Or, perhaps, they had just noticed Ghostbur's interest in him, and were curious.

They certainly did see Ghostbur, that was for sure. Yet, the devils and Ghostbur must exist on slightly different planes of existence because they couldn't touch each other. Oh, the devils had *tried*. The little ink demons could tell he was something else, something almost like them, and they did not like it. Every one that saw him almost immediately tried to jump at him like little demonic honey badgers, but they always passed harmlessly through him, hissing and spitting when they realized they couldn't hurt him.

Techno didn't see them anymore than he saw Ghostbur, but they seemed to grow more and more interested in him over the next few days. At any time, there were a dozen to 20 circling around them with their beady little not eyes.

"He's mine," Ghostbur would snap at them anytime one of them got too close.

They'd snap their razer sharp "teeth" at him in response, but ultimately never challenged him for real.

In this way, they made a little procession through the city, all following Techno's dead body as it wandered aimlessly through the streets (except on the occasion it was drawn into a hunt).

Ghostbur found himself speaking to Techno even though he couldn't hear him. Maybe if he spoke enough something would get through like the ink devil's little whispers seemed to affect the minds of people they targeted.

This in mind, Ghostbur spoke a lot, but he did his best to steer clear of any bad things. Considering that everything happening in the city right now was bad, Ghostbur cast his mind back.

He spoke of the babies that were born in the hospital each day and about how the nurses in the maternity ward would give all of them little color-coded hats that the parents could take home.

He talked about the music concerts that would always happen in the parks in late summer right before school went back into session.

He listed all of the fun facts he'd learned about different animals while spying on zoology courses at the university.

He spewed out every nice thing he could remember from his time as a ghost.

And when he ran out of those things, because really, most of those things he'd done since dying were colored by the fact that he was dead, and thus were sad by default, he found himself turning to even older memories. Memories that were at once his own and belonged to someone long gone.

"The first Halloween I remember was when I was 4 or maybe 5. Dad got me a lion costume. I remember getting so much candy, even a whole chocolate bar from one house. Dad didn't let me eat all of it in one go like I wanted, but that was okay. He kept a picture of me dressed up as a lion in the living room forever."

He omitted the fact that forever ended up not being forever. Said picture was in storage now; it had been for years since that living room and the house it was inside was sold.

Techno's hair had been ripped by the skeletons that bit him. The flesh had started to peel away from his skull there.

"After my first day of kindergarten, Dad took me to a fancy restaurant for lunch to celebrate. (The first day of school was always a half-day.) It made me feel like a grown up even though I ordered mac and cheese from the kid's menu. Honestly, I think it was more of a lunch for Dad than for me. It was one of his favorite places to eat, and he'd been sad that I was going to be going to school full-time. He was silly back then."

He didn't say anything about how sad Dad was when Wilbur wasn't just gone for a school day but gone forever.

There was a noise down an alleyway, and Techno's corpse stopped. It turned quickly and sharply towards it.

"Dad makes really, really good hot chocolate," Ghostbur said. "I know you had some hot chocolate from him before, but that was the powder stuff. That's good too, but on the coldest days when he had the materials, he'd make it from scratch, and it was even better. He even can make homemade whipped cream for it! When we had snow days and stayed home from school, he'd bundle me up in

an ugly poofy green coat. We'd go out and play in the snow for a long time. When it finally got too cold, we'd go back inside, and he'd made the hot chocolate for me."

Ghostbur couldn't remember what hot chocolate tasted like at this point. Nor did he quite remember what being cold felt like.

He thought seeing blood on Techno's mouth was a good approximation.

Everything would reset soon, Ghostbur told himself. He told Techno.

Either someone would come along and kill Techno's corpse releasing his soul, or he'd finally completely die. While dying to zombification was a horrible, slow death, Ghostbur doubted it was different enough to counter Techno's powers.

(Though knowing that didn't keep Wilbur from worrying something would go wrong. He couldn't help but watch Techno's soul, worried when it finally slipped out of the cruel limbo he was currently in, it would fall the wrong way.)

Everything would be alright, Ghostbur told him. Everything would be okay again.

(For now, as was always the case for the dead, there was nothing Ghostbur or Techno could do but watch and wait for the timer to go down. So, Ghostbur watched and waited. He snapped his teeth at any ink devil that came too close to his baby brother. It was their fault anyway. He *hated* them.)

He continued to tell stories of a better life and of a city not crumbling beneath their feet.

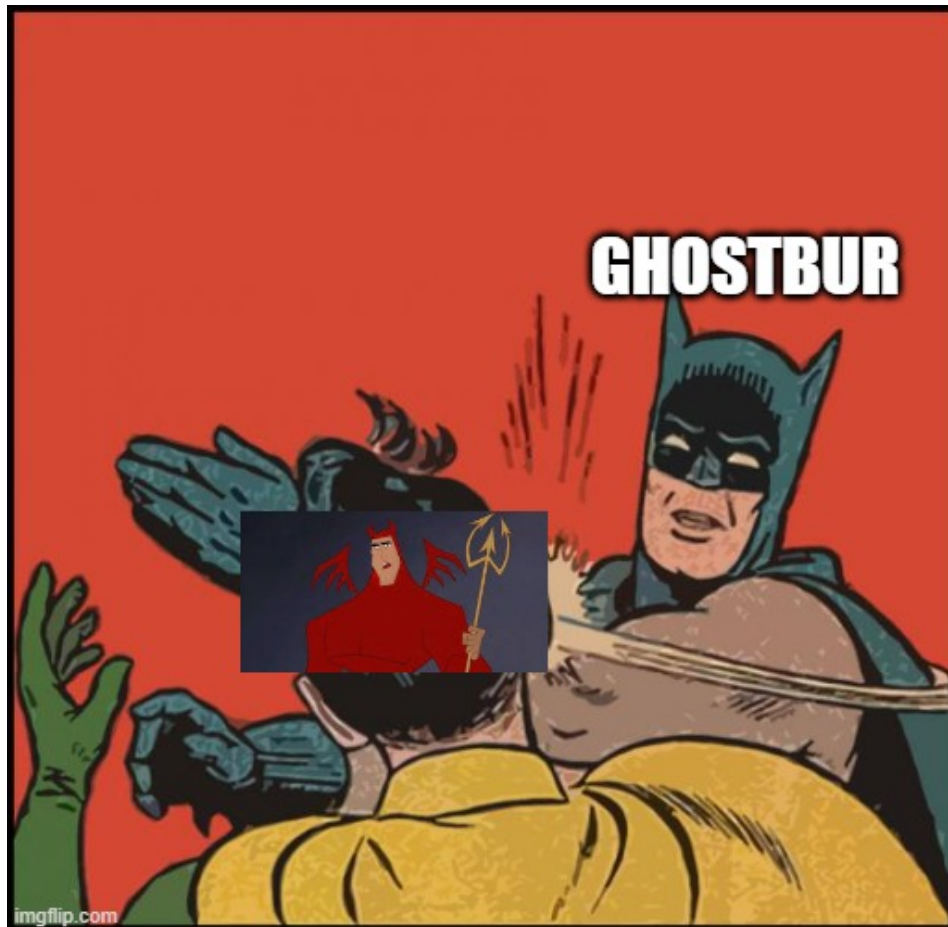
Then, finally, after days of this, there was a sudden shift in Techno.

His soul stopped and he closed his eyes.

Unlike every time before (likely because of the length of time needing to be reset), it wasn't a quick snap that brought them back. Instead, there was about a 2 second delay as Ghostbur watched Techno's body back away from his soul. The devils went with it, but Ghostbur and Techno stayed standing there for a moment, two. The sun set quickly in the East 5 times before Techno's soul disappeared and Ghostbur was suddenly snapped back into an alleyway a bit away from downtown.

"Alright," Techno said, the moment he was back. "Not left then."

Chapter End Notes



[from Imgflip Meme Generator](#)

How bad this meme looks actually makes me giggle, thanks.

Lines Blur

Chapter Notes

If you saw me accidentally upload this in One Step Forward, no you didn't.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Keeping himself together was not exactly easy now, but it was possible. This was a vast improvement over what had been happening to Ghostbur before. Every day he was getting better at staying focused on one thing at a time. That wasn't to say that he wasn't split up into multiple pieces a majority of the time, but he'd learned to pay more attention to one perspective at a time. He no longer felt like he was being ripped apart at the seams by everything he could see.

Like right now he was observing as Dad helped Techno's new friend Niki train with her powers. They'd been training a lot recently. Dad was good at pushing her enough that she was improving quickly but she wasn't at risk of burning out. It helped that she was already physically fit and proficient at using her powers in a noncombative capacity. She was progressing quickly enough that they planned to return to the city for a test run of her powers sometime next week.

Meanwhile, he also sat next to Technoblade on a stack of hay. Techno had been training as well earlier, but he was taking a break for once and Bea had climbed into his lap for pets. (She was very effective at keeping him there and Ghostbur thought she and Dad might be in cahoots.)

He also was getting glimpses of the city and its struggle to survive. There were many people who were dead or zombies already, but there were still some alive, perhaps a surprising amount of them considering everything that had happened.

There were actually fewer skeletons in the city right now due in part to a hero named Scintilla who'd used his powers to burn many of them to a crisp only a few days before. They'd been trying to scale one of the weakening outer city walls, but the hero had managed to fight them back and take a good number of them down. He'd ended up getting bitten during the fray and had jumped from the wall he'd been defending once he'd managed to drive them all back successfully instead of facing zombification.

Though it likely wouldn't last for long, he'd gained the city a brief reprieve from the skeletons (though many zombies mindlessly wandered through it still) and people outside the city, including Dad and Techno, were still safe for now.

Ghostbur wasn't focused on any of those things right now though. Instead, he was doing a bit of reconnaissance. (If he could call it that since he had no one to give the information he acquired to.)

His interest had been drawn by the simple fact that all three of the leaders of the city were in the same room for the first time in a long time. Schlatt had been out of commission for weeks after raising the skeletons and Bad had been busy trying very hard to keep the heroes from questioning what was going on. However, a few days after Scintilla's burning of the skeletons, both Schlatt and Bad had been summoned to Mayor Werner's office.

The Hero Guild HQ had burned long ago, and all of the (living) heroes and government officials were now working out of the “oddly” untouched city hall. It was a strange building choice for a city hall. It had been commissioned by Mayor Werner a couple of years ago. Once, it had been the second tallest building in the city before the previously tallest one had been toppled during the first wave of conflict. Now it was the tallest.

The entire top floor of city hall had been and was still the mayor’s office. The floor below had been converted into a makeshift apartment complex that she and Schlatt split. The rest of the building had been split up amongst those working for her. Most of the tower wasn’t as nice as the top two floors, but the building was the only safe location in the city, so Ghostbur doubted many people were complaining.

Mayor Werner’s desk was positioned in front of a floor length window. If she spun around in her chair, she’d be able to see the chaos going on in the streets. However, for the moment she was facing away from the window. Schlatt and Bad were seated in chairs across from her. The one other... occupant in the room stood behind and to the left of Bad.

“It’s not my fault some hero went rogue and torched them,” Schlatt was saying, snapping really. His face was beat red and he looked like he was a few seconds away from punching someone. Ghostbur was unsurprised by this behavior after having observed him off and on for the past few weeks. “I don’t exactly have any long-dead bones in my back pocket to replace them, do you?”

“I’m not blaming you,” Mayor Werner said. Her tone was the opposite of Schlatt’s fiery one. Her tone was a cool calm.

“Well it sure, fucking, sounds like you are,” Schlatt spat. “I can make bodies stand up after being dead for centuries, but I can’t do shit with ashes.”

“I know.”

“If anything, it’s his fault,” Schlatt said, throwing an arm at Bad. It barely missed hitting him. “Isn’t the whole point of him to keep the heroes under control?”

There were a few seconds where no one said anything. The silence was clearly room for Bad to speak, but he didn’t say anything. He didn’t even respond at all. Mayor Werner frowned and then picked up the conversation.

“He can’t control all of the heroes perfectly,” Mayor Werner said. “One or two were bound to slip through eventually, but it is simply a setback, not a disaster. Scintilla was an exception.”

“Are we sure?” Schlatt asked with a raised eyebrow. He turned to face Bad fully. “Because he seems less competent since the Scintilla incident and that’s saying something.”

That was something Ghostbur had observed himself. Bad had been... not great before the Scintilla incident, but he’d been practically catatonic ever since.

Ghostbur forced himself to glance at the room’s *other* occupant. It was a hard thing for Ghostbur to look at, like looking at yourself in a mirror only to find the image’s color pallet had been inverted. The man standing beside Bad was dead, but not dead like Ghostbur. He was the antithesis of Ghostbur.

His body was almost perfectly preserved. It could move. It could do basic tasks. It could even understand what people were saying to a certain degree. Really, the only thing that instantly gave

away he was dead was the bullet hole that went through his skull cleanly enough that Ghostbur thought he could probably see through it if he could bring himself to try.

Whoever he had been was completely gone. There wasn't even a dying soul being dragged around by the corpse like other zombies sometimes had. There was simply nothing.

One of Bad's devils sat on the body's shoulder. It was different than all of the other devils Ghostbur had seen if not in its physical form. Unlike its brethren, it ignored Ghostbur as much as Ghostbur tried to ignore the body it was perched on. Ghostbur had never seen the walking corpse without the little devil and doubted it ever left its shoulder.

Every so often, the devil would rub its face up against the corpse's cheek. It had done so often enough that there was now a slowly growing black mark on the body's skin that Ghostbur had heard Mayor Werner and Schlatt discussing. They were worried it was rot defying Schlatt's powers. It was not.

"Hey," Schlatt said, reaching over to snap in Bad's face. "Is anyone in there?"

Bad's eyes slowly focused on the fingers and then moved to Schlatt's face. "I can't control all of the heroes," he said rather blandly. He turned away, his eyes catching on the body standing next to him.

Schlatt noticed the direction of Bad's gaze and sneered. "He's fucking dead, you idiot," Schlatt growled and then said under his breath. "I swear you're worse than the zombie."

Bad's attention snapped back to Schlatt. The devil on the body's shoulder perked up suddenly, going so far as to arch its back like a startled cat. It, however, didn't turn to look at Schlatt. It turned to look at Mayor Werner.

Mayor Werner, Ghostbur was pretty sure, could not see the devils. However, he wondered if some part of her sensed its attention because she went suddenly tense.

"Schlatt," Mayor Werner said, her voice sharpening. "Stop."

"Why?" Schlatt asked. "This is getting fucking annoying. What's the point of both of us expending our energy on this if he's useless anyway? He's just gotten worse!"

"Bad," Mayor Werner said, turning away from Schlatt without responding. She stood and sat on the edge of her desk near him. His eyes tracked hers, suddenly a lot less dazed than they usually were. "Why don't you and Skeppy go downstairs and get some lunch, hmm? I'm pretty sure he hasn't eaten in a while." She reached out to touch Bad's forehead with two of her fingers. The devil slowly sat back down on the body's shoulder. The daze entered Bad's eyes again. Bad nodded and stood.

"Come on Skeppy. Let's get something to eat," he said to the body. The body turned to look at him and followed him out.

The second the door closed, Mayor Werner's attention snapped back to Schlatt.

"What?" Schlatt asked, his tone petulant.

"You know what," Mayor Werner scolded. "Stop pushing him."

"It's not like anything ever gets through to him."

"But it could one day," Mayor Werner said.

Schlatt just rolled his eyes and folded his arms.

Mayor Werner sighed. “I know you don’t quite get things yet. You’re new to this, but you have to understand what you’re dealing with. Bad is powerful. He’s older than both of us if we multiplied our ages together. He’s brought the most powerful villains in history to their knees. He’s *almost* a God, and we can use that power, but we have to be careful.”

She scooted around on the desk so she was closer to Schlatt.

“The only thing keeping Bad under our control right now is a wish and a dream. As long as he can be convinced to tote around his little pet dead body thinking its still alive, we have the power. If you shock him out of his denial, we lose that power. So, *stop* poking.”

A sliver of the ever-persistent anger seemed to drain out of Schlatt at that. “I just don’t like it,” he said. “The whole thing makes me feel uncomfortable.”

“I know,” she said, her voice changing from lecture mode to sugary sweet sympathy in a way that gave Ghostbur whiplash, “but dealing with small discomforts is the price of power. You want power, don’t you?”

“I *want* my dead kid back,” Schlatt corrected, “but since that’s apparently the only thing they can’t give me, I’ll take revenge instead.”

“And you’ll get it,” she promised. She reached out a hand to touch his shoulder and he shied away. She raised her hand in surrender when she noticed. “Right, sorry,” she said. She folded her hands very pointedly in her lap. “You can trust me, Schlatt. We’re the same, yeah? We both took that same exact deal, and as someone farther along in the process, I can promise it’ll be worth it.”

She stood up then and moved back to the other side of her desk. Instead of sitting back in the chair, she stood at the window, looking down at the dying city below.

“Look out there,” she said. “The world is crumbling at our touch.”

“It’s not right,” Schlatt said with a grimace. “It’s not enough.”

“Well, we’re not done yet,” she said, turning back to him with a smile. “There’s plenty more to be done. We’re going to take this world: Nightmare and Wither 2.0, just like it was always meant to be. They knew the moment you were born. Your powers were made for this even more than your grandmother’s were. When we’re done, we’ll both be gods. We just have to hold up our ends of the deals. That includes not telling Bad to his face that his pet is long dead.”

“Fine,” Schlatt said. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine,” Mayor Werner said. “I know it’s been a rough couple of days.”

Schlatt rubbed the bridge of his nose. “I need a drink.”

“And I think you deserve one,” she said with a grin, “*but* I do need your powers for one little thing before you dim the lights with alcohol.”

Schlatt grimaced but didn’t protest. “What?” he asked.

“I promise it’s nothing too strenuous,” she said. “Come with me. I have a little gift for us both.”

Schlatt still seemed leery but got up to follow. Ghostbur followed after them curiously.

“Now, I’ve been doing a bit of an investigation into those working for us ever since Scintilla’s little stunt,” Mayor Werner explained as they walked down the hall towards some of her office’s more private rooms. “I want to make sure none of our soldiers have anything that could distract them from our mission.”

“Okay?”

“Luckily, I’ve recently found a very intriguing mind read amongst the hero ranks who seems to have her priorities in line. I might even be tempted to offer them a deal if they continue to prove themselves useful. This was the first test.”

“Your investigation?”

“Yes. See, our mind reader friend found a little weakness in our ranks. One of our mercenaries has a little brother.”

“And?” Schlatt asked, probably thinking what Ghostbur was thinking. Plenty of heroes and government officials have families.

“Well, this little brother has been participating in some vigilantism recently. According to the mind reader, our mercenary isn’t aware of his brother’s activities, but if he found out, it’d be a tossup if he’d decide to stick with us or his brother. I thought we’d turn that little threat into an advantage.”

They stopped at a door and she knocked briefly before entering.

Ghostbur took stock of the room. It was not furnished at all besides a small table. Comparing it to the other lavishly decorated rooms in the mayor’s office made him worry about what it was used for. Even more concerning than that was that fact that the entire floor had been covered in plastic. On the small table there were a few different sized knives.

Two people were in the room. One was a tall person that Ghostbur realized he recognized. They’d been a hero and Ghostbur had seen him around in passing before Dad left The Guild.

The other person was a young boy, probably around 14 or 15. He was on the ground and unconscious with a nasty headwound. He’d been tied up securely and gagged. Some blood was slowly leaking from various cuts on his body, but he was breathing.

Mayor Werner smiled warmly at Eret. “Thank you Eret,” she said. “Your dedication has been noted and will be rewarded. You may go.”

Eret simply nodded and exited the room.

Mayor Werner watched them go. She nodded to herself once. “I do think that one would make a nice addition,” she said absently. “Very power driven.”

In the meantime, Schlatt’s eyes were darting around the sparse room. “What are we doing exactly?”

Mayor Werner turned to him and smiled widely. “Well,” she said. “I was thinking about how to solve the vigilante brother problem, and I had a great idea. Our powers worked so well together on Bad, so let’s just do it again.”

Schlatt blinked down at the boy on the floor. “But,” he said, “he’s alive.”

“Yes, well, it went so perfectly with Bad’s pet because of how fresh the kill was, so I figured this would be even better. You can just kill him and instantly revive him.”

Schlatt opened his mouth but didn’t seem to be able to think of anything to say. “I…”

“Is there a problem?” she asked.

“I, well, it’s just, I’ve never killed anyone before,” he said.

Mayor Werner squinted at him and smiled a bemused smile. “What are you talking about?” she asked. “Of course, you have.”

There was one second where Schlatt was utterly still and then he shook himself. “Yeah, right. Of course. You’re right. Yeah. I can do that.”

“Great,” Mayor Werner said. She reached over and grabbed one of the knives from the table and pushed it into Schlatt’s hands. Her phone buzzed at that moment. “Right. Sorry to run, but this took longer than expected, and I need to be at a press conference in 5. You just handle this. Leave the revived body here afterwards, and I’ll work my magic on his brother later. Once you’re done, there’s a whole bottle of brandy in my desk, and you can have as much of it as you want.”

“Thanks,” Schlatt said. “I’ll do that.”

She smiled at him before turning to walk out of the room.

The door closed behind her with a sharp snap leaving Schlatt and the unconscious boy behind.

Ghostbur watched her wander away down the hall, but most of his attention remained in the bare, plastic covered room.

Schlatt stared at the door for a long moment and then looked at the boy on the floor. His eyes traveled to the knife in his hand and then to the boy again.

“What,” Schlatt said to himself, and unbeknownst to him, to Ghostbur, “the *fuck* am I doing.”

Ghostbur tilted his head as he watched the man start to breathe heavily. That was… unexpected. The man brought his hand up to grip at his chest only to almost stab himself with the knife. He panicked and dropped the weapon to the floor with a reverberating clatter.

He followed the weapon to the ground himself after a moment on hand and knee.

The one thing Ghostbur had noticed about Schlatt was that he only had three moods: angry, drunk, and drunk and angry. He was nasty to everyone in city hall, only ever able to be reined in by the mayor. He yelled at staff members. He sneered at heroes. He turned already stressed people on each other for the fun of watching the resulting chaos. He was a man starved for power and once he had it, he’d chosen to abuse it. As he’d said, he was here for revenge. For what precisely and on who didn’t really seem to matter to him.

Yet, there was no anger in him in this moment. He was stone cold sober.

He was frozen, eyes blown wide, and probably having a full-blown anxiety attack if Ghostbur had to guess. It took him a good 5 minutes to pull himself together enough to even look over at the kid. He stared at the prone figure and then he extended one of his legs.

“Kid,” Schlatt said, kicking him lightly on the arm. “Kid, wake up.”

The kid was not going to be waking up, Ghostbur thought. That bump on his head had clearly been inflicted by someone who hadn’t cared if he’d ever be able to wake up again.

“Fucking...” Schlatt trailed off and glanced around himself like he was expecting someone to be watching him. Someone was, but there was no way for him to know that.

He moved to crawl closer to the unconscious boy and with a shaking hand touched his fingers to the kid’s forehead.

Schlatt’s fingers sparked green, and the kid jerked like he’d been electrocuted, his eyes popping open. He took about half a second to take in his surroundings and then was rolling away.

“Wait! Shit!” Schlatt tried to grab him, but somehow the boy managed to roll to his feet.

That hadn’t been healing in any form, Ghostbur thought. Whatever Schlatt had done, it hadn’t done anything to actually fix the kid. The kid’s headwound was still dripping blood and his pupils were dramatically different sizes. He very certainly shouldn’t be on his feet right now, but here he was.

“Look kid,” Schlatt said, but he was cut off by a growl, the most the kid could do with the gag in his mouth. “I’m trying to help.”

The kid did not seem to believe him, continuing to growl.

“At least let me take the gag out.”

The kid seemed to consider it, but eventually relaxed his posture slightly in what Ghostbur and Schlatt took as consent.

Schlatt slowly got to his feet and closed the distance between them. He reached up to pull the gag out of his mouth.

The kid instantly spat in his face.

“Fucking really?!” Schlatt said, jerking back.

“Fuck you!”

“Look kid, I’m trying to save your life.”

“What the fuck? Why?” the kid asked, confused.

“They want me to kill you to get at your brother,” Schlatt explained, “but I’m not slitting some random kid’s throat.”

“Why not?” the kid asked, raising one eyebrow. “I’m no different than all the other kids out there that are dying.”

“And I am currently trying to cope with that slowly dawning revelation. Look, just, don’t look a gift horse in the mouth. Count yourself lucky that watching you bleed out in a murder room is apparently my bullshit limit. Now what’s your brother’s name?”

The kid glared at him suspiciously.

“Werner already knows. That’s why you’re here. I need to know so I can get the two of you out of here before you end up undead and he ends up fucking mind controlled.”

The kid considered him for a few seconds. “You lot call him Punz.”

“Great,” Schlatt said. He grabbed one of the other knives from the table, a smaller one than the one still laying on the floor. “I’m going to get that stuff off you now,” he told the kid.

The kid nodded his consent and Schlatt went about freeing him. “Do you think you can walk?” he asked when he finished.

“Of course, I can,” the kid said. “Why wouldn’t I?”

Schlatt eyed his beaten-up body and very bloody head wound. “Huh,” he said. “You know. I don’t actually know what using my necromancy powers on someone still alive does to them.”

“You used what on me?” the boy shrieked.

“Let’s just hope whatever it is keeps you on your feet until you and your brother are away from this hellhole,” Schlatt said turning to the door. “Let’s go.”

Despite his clear misgivings about the situation, the boy didn’t really have anywhere else to go, and so followed Schlatt back towards the main office area.

Schlatt crossed to Mayor Werner’s desk, ignoring the kid as he wandered around looking at the office décor. He picked up the landline phone sitting on the desk. “Hey,” he said down the line, “Is Punz down there? I need him in Werner’s office right now. I don’t care what he’s doing. He needs to get here three minutes ago.”

He must have gotten a confirmation because he hung up the phone right after that. He then turned to open the desk drawers.

“You’re drinking,” the kid said, disgust pulling at his lips. “Right now?”

“Alcohol dulls my powers,” Schlatt explained.

“Oh,” the kid said, watching him as he opened the bottle of brandy he’d found and took a swig. “Well, then I hope you get alcohol poisoning.”

Schlatt chucked on a laugh at that. “Don’t we all, kid. Don’t we all.”

The rest of the few minutes it took for Punz to arrive in the mayor’s office were spent in awkward silence between the two save for the sound of Schlatt guzzling alcohol.

Finally, the elevator dinged, and a man stepped out. He looked quite unconcerned and bored at the summons for a half a second before he saw the kid.

“*Purpled?*” he stuttered in surprise. “Why the fuck are you here? What happened?”

“Take him and run,” Schlatt said.

“What?” Punz asked.

“Your brother’s a vigilante. Werner found out and wants his throat slit and for me to puppet his body to use against you. If you want your kid brother to live, you’ll get out of here right now and never look back.”

The man blinked at him a few times. “Purpled?” he asked.

“We really do need to go,” the kid answered. Punz nodded. He still looked confused, but it was fading.

“Okay,” he said. “Okay. Let’s go. Right now.” He stepped over to his brother and grabbed him by the arm. His eyes skimmed his injuries worriedly.

“You have 20 minutes before she comes back to this office and realizes his corpse isn’t propped up and waiting for her,” Schlatt said. “There are fewer zombies west of here right now.”

“I... thanks?” Punz said.

“Try not to let him die and make this pointless, yeah?” Schlatt said.

“Yeah,” Punz replied. He pulled his brother to the elevator and then they were gone.

Schlatt grabbed the brandy once again. He took another swig and then screwed the cap back on but didn’t set it down. “Fuck all of this,” he said.

The alcohol was the only thing he took with him as he exited the building and walked (and later stumbled) east.

Chapter End Notes



[from Imgflip Meme Generator](#)

Well anyway. Someone has misplaced their necromancer. Big L to the mayor.

Have fun digesting all of the lore in this one. If you can figure out the main literary theme of "One Step Forward" and "Like Footsteps on a Seashore" from this chapter, I'll give you a cookie. I put some key words in there. ;)

Hey There Delilah

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Ghostbur thought that the cat might be able to see him. He wasn't completely sure as she never clearly reacted to things he did or said, but there were many times she *could* have been reacting to him. Sometimes she'd turn her head almost eerily in his direction and stare, her eyes seeming to fall on him and not through him to the wall behind like every other person and creature's did.

And then, five minutes later, she'd give that same stare to a piece of empty space nowhere near where Ghostbur was.

Right now, she could have been looking at him, though he still couldn't be sure. He squinted at her with his glowing blue eyes and one of her whiskers twitched. He was hovering just above the floor in the farmhouse storm cellar. If the kitten could see him, it would look like he was laying on his stomach with his head propped up on folded hands.

"Can you see me?" Ghostbur asked.

The cat tilted her head, never breaking eye contact with Ghostbur.

"Give me a sign if you can see me," he stressed.

Her ear twitched which Ghostbur was about to take as a sign that she could hear something from him at least. He realized that she was reacting to a sound on the physical plane when he also heard footsteps descending the wooden stairs into the cellar.

Arms came down to swoop Ghostbur's staring partner off the floor.

"Hey Persephone," Techno greeted her as she made a small mewling sound.

Persephone's name was not originally Persephone. Her name had been Delilah once. Her mother's owners had kept one of the kittens from the older cat's litter and had named her that. Delilah's previous owners, two older women, had managed to survive for an impressively long time during the apocalypse considering both were pushing 70 and one had diabetes. However, they'd ended up dying 3 weeks before Techno and Dad had taken back zone 13. Delilah's mother had lasted until the day before her daughter's rescue.

Of course, Technoblade, having been firmly hosted inside a human body for all of those events, had no way of knowing any of that. So, he'd named her Persephone.

"What are you doing down here?" Techno asked the cat.

"We were trying to communicate," Ghostbur said, scowling up at him. (Or, at least, Ghostbur was trying to communicate. Delilah may have just seen a bug.) "But you've distracted her now."

The kitten batted at Techno's face in response to his question.

"That's rude," Techno informed her blankly.

She reacted by, instead of batting him this time, extending her paw and leaving it over his mouth.

“Message received,” Techno said, smirking under her paw. With a sigh, he lowered himself to sit on the floor, cat still in his lap.

Techno looked exhausted and not just in the physical way. He’d used his powers more often in the past few weeks than he had in years. Even though he denied it to Dad, it obviously took a toll on him, perhaps in some ways even more than it had when he’d been younger. He understood what was happening to him this time.

It certainly took a toll on Ghostbur watching him die like that over and over.

Techno gently scratched under the kitten’s chin, and she stretched out her neck. “So, what do you think about all of this?” he asked.

“She’s a cat,” Ghostbur said grumpily. He moved from where he’d been floating on his stomach to an upright position, mirroring the way Techno sat cross-legged in front of him. “She can’t talk back to you.” If she could, figuring out if she could see Ghostbur would have been so much easier.

“There’s a lot of people around now,” Techno continued. “Is that why you’re hiding out in here?”

“Is that why you are?” Ghostbur asked, an eyebrow raised.

Techno frowned and was silent for a moment as he stroked the cat’s fur. Ghostbur could almost imagine that he was contemplating Ghostbur’s question and trying to imagine a lie that would save face, that they were just two boys, brothers, having an intimate conversation as the world tried its hardest to end itself outside. That Ghostbur was the 21-year-old (almost 22-year-old) man he should have been and not perpetually stuck with the visage of an 8-year-old visible only to himself, Bad’s ink demons, and (maybe) a cat. That he didn’t at the same time feel older than any human could ever hope to be, lost in a sea of knowledge that he chose to turn away from in this moment to be fully present with a little brother who would never know him except in stories.

“It’s good we cleared out zone 10,” Techno said, sounding like he was trying to convince himself. Zone 10 was bigger than zones 13 and 11, which the group had cleared out before, and there had been much more danger involved in clearing it. So, naturally, it had meant more deaths for Technoblade. “We have a lot more people to fight with us now.”

They’d found a larger number of survivors in zone 10, almost 50 people in one group and a few smaller groups scattered through the zone. It was just over 100 people total. It was a measly percentage of the original population, but it had almost tripled their total recovered survivor’s count. Plus, many of the people in zone 10 were fighters unlike those rescued from 13 and 11. The larger group had been headed by three vigilantes who’d teamed up and recruited any stray survivors they’d come across. They’d been running low on supplies and were thankful for the assistance, but with a bit of food and rest, many of them were able and willing to join in the fight to take back the city.

“We have the makings of a real army now,” Techno continued. “That’s good. It was... worth it.”

Techno sounded unsure. Ghostbur was very sure. It was not worth it.

Ghostbur was a selfish, selfish ghost. He didn’t care much about most living people. Did he feel bad about the 10-year-old currently having her skull crushed near the old children’s museum he’d gone to on his last field trip alive? Sure, but she at least had gotten to live to 10.

Ghostbur wouldn’t mind if the whole world burned as long as Dad and Techno didn’t. He wished they would just fly away from this city and let it kill itself, but he knew Dad couldn’t stomach that. And,

really, would he even be Dad if he did?

“I’m weak,” Techno admitted, and Ghostbur was sure he would never say that to anyone but the cat. “I don’t want to do this anymore.”

“Not wanting to die isn’t weak, Technoblade,” Ghostbur said, “and if you could hear me, you’d already know I don’t want you to do it anymore either.”

“I’m not like Phil,” Techno said. “He’s a hero, a real one, not like all of those pretenders, but I’m not. All of these people we’ve gotten out of the city look at me like I am one, because I saved them. They don’t recognize me from before. I wonder what they would think if they did. I’m not a hero. I’m paying off a debt.”

Ghostbur was silent.

“I’ve been keeping track,” Techno said. “I owe the city over 500 lives. I owe the world more if I count the deaths in the Pit.”

“You owe nothing,” Ghostbur said, vehemently, hand coming up to grip Techno’s shoulder. It would bruise if Techno could feel it, but as it was, his fingers disappeared slightly into his skin. He was too distracted to notice the cat jerk its head around to look at him. “The world owes you.”

There was a long, long pause. Ghostbur silently wished that this train of thought would lead to Techno refusing to go on another mission. He wished that he would refuse to die again for even more people Ghostbur couldn’t care less about.

“I don’t want to do this anymore,” Techno said, “but I will.”

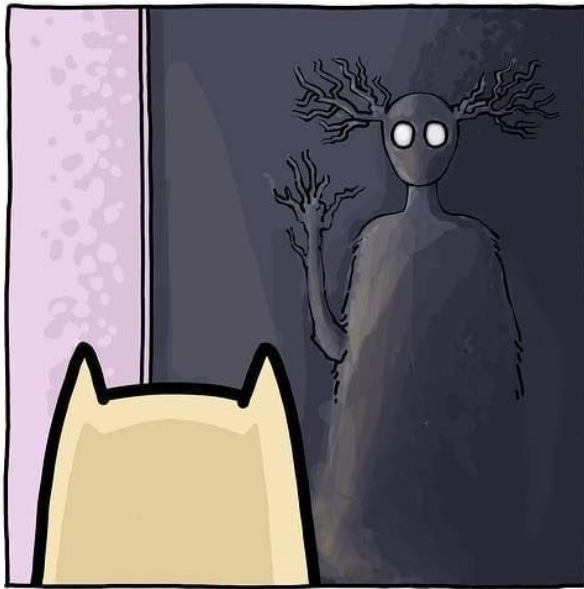
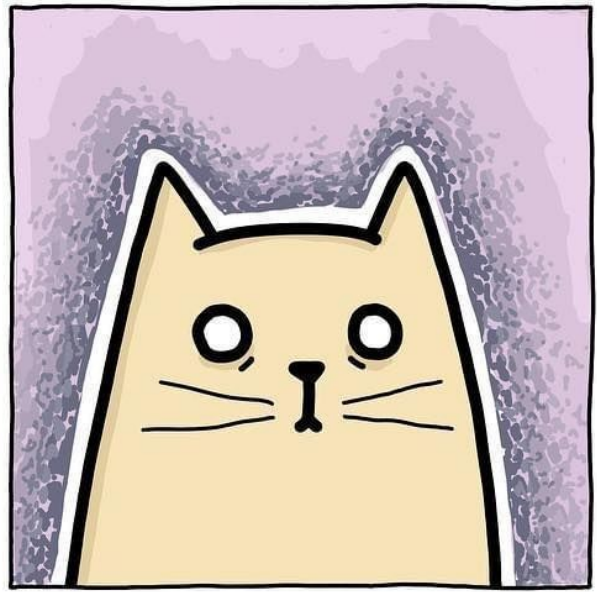
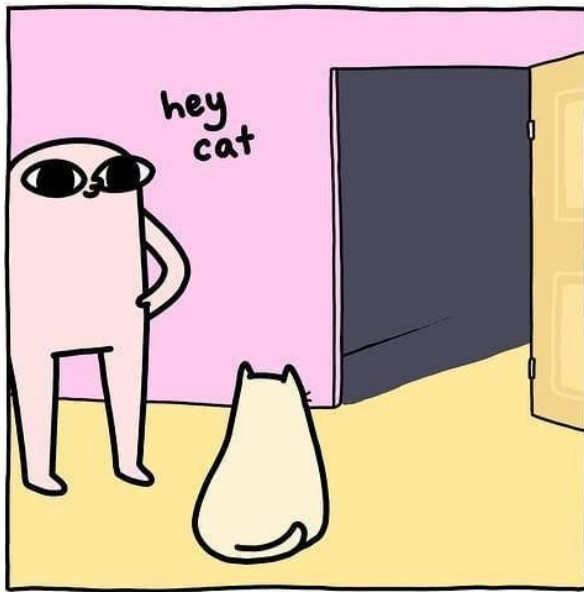
“I know you will,” Ghostbur gritted out, “because you’re not actually paying off a debt, are you?” He released Techno’s shoulder and left 5 spots of blue on the man’s shirt. Techno didn’t notice. “That’s not why you’re doing it no matter how much you’ve convinced yourself it is.”

And Ghostbur hated it, though he knew it was an inevitability. Dad could not turn his back on the world, and Techno couldn’t turn his back on Dad.

Techno released the cat then, setting her on the ground and standing up. He looked just as tired as he’d been when he’d entered the room. The cat mewed at him, unhappy he was no longer giving her attention.

“I have to get ready for tomorrow,” Techno told her with a half-smile. He reached down to pat her one last time before turning to scale the wooden stairs to the outside world. The cat was still not done with him and trotted after him while yowling her complaints.

Dad could not turn his back on the world; Techno could not turn his back on Dad; and Ghostbur couldn’t turn his back on either one of them even though sometimes he wished he could. He didn’t want to watch.



Falling Backwards

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The world froze when Dad fell. It actually, really, froze. The zombies froze and the heroes froze. Niki and Puffy and all the rest froze. Even the lightning streaking across the sky froze. Thunder cut off abruptly and so did every other sound.

Mayor Werner froze too. She was midair with a stupid little smirk on her deranged face.

“God, huh?” Ghostbur asked her with a scoff even though she could not hear him for multiple reasons. It soothed just a fraction of his otherwise unbridled rage to see how absolutely full of shit she was.

Ghostbur did not have time to process let alone mourn his father’s abrupt death, because suddenly, there was no time at all.

Technoblade ran to Dad’s side fast. How fast was hard to determine when there were no seconds to measure the distance by, but it was fast. Techno was crying, but the tears froze midair as they left his cheeks. If he were to stay like that, there would eventually be a puddle hovering midair at his neck.

He wouldn’t be staying like that, Ghostbur knew. He was about to reverse time, and Ghostbur could sense that it wasn’t going to be like all of the other times he had before.

Technoblade’s eyes were closed, and so Ghostbur was the only witness to the end of the world.

It began with Technoblade himself. His hands blurred in a fractal like pattern, seemingly infinite copied images of his hands and then his body and then his face overlapping each other, each image slightly off from the next. It was almost like watching a 3-D movie without the glasses. The blur spread from him to everything around him and then to everything in the city and then to everything in the world.

The universe hung in this state without breath before suddenly snapping back into clarity and back into motion. The motion went the wrong way.

Ghostbur had seen Technoblade reverse a slightly longer period of time exactly once when he’d been bitten by a zombie, and it had taken him days to truly die. So, the experience, if not its longevity, was familiar enough.

Techno and Dad stayed exactly where they were, but simultaneously Dad’s body began to rise back into the sky and Techno was suddenly a few blocks away again.

Time quickly flew backwards. The fighting stopped, the heroes and Bad left, and Dad and Techno’s doubles left the cities with their allies. The small horde of zombies disbanded back to their previous individual lurking spaces. The sun set in the East and then it did it again and again.

Ghostbur watched as the events of the war that had killed his father undid themselves. First, skeletons retreated and crawled back into the ground and then hordes of zombies unmade themselves in the streets. He saw fallen building in zone 12 rebuild themselves in the distance and fires reignited only to leave an unburnt skyline in their wakes.

Then there were people walking backward through the streets, going to work and going home or going to parks or restaurants. The people who walked past never penetrated the bubble around Dad and Techno. If they were destined to cross there, they disappeared about 3 feet away and then reappeared on the other side of them a few moments later. Ghostbur watched as cars drove in reverse and airplanes ate their own vapor trails.

He expected it to stop about then. It did not.

He saw police cars and heroes out in full ranks in the city from the night Techno was captured. He might have even seen a flash of wings far away in the sky. He saw Werner's campaign posters torn down. He saw the Head of Guild Sullivan alive and well being driven away from an important speech somewhere in zone 9.

Ghostbur did not think to keep track of the number of times the sun set in the wrong part of the sky until it was too late for it to mean anything. If time meant anything in this bubble of still air around Techno and Dad, Ghostbur would say it probably took over an hour to stop.

Finally, the reversal of time slowed. The world froze completely once again.

Dad was the first to disappear. He vanished under Technoblade's hand without Techno even seeming to notice. Then, Techno faded as well leaving Ghostbur alone on a frozen city street four blocks away from his old home.

He felt time click forward once, an eighth of a second, no, less, much less, and something changed.

It was strange. Ghostbur hadn't *felt* anything in a very, very long time, but suddenly he felt the sensation of...

Of...

Of falling backwards.

Chapter End Notes

Ghostbur (and Wilbur) will return in [*Two Steps Back*](#).

Also! If you are interested in what exactly the 6 mixed up mini stories were in Chapter 11, they are now posted in the [accessibility chapter](#).

And! I have [a tumblr blog specifically for Stepping Stones](#) set up now. Feel free to visit it and send asks with questions to it.

Phil: *dies*

Technoblade: Absolutely not. I demand two tickets to another reality immediately.

The cashier, chewing gum: Sure, and just so you know, it's a buy 2 get 1 free deal.

Technoblade, not paying attention: Yeah, sure whatever.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!